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Prince's plea

AT A GALA dinner held this week in New York's *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Prince Charles appealed for donations to help Egypt's Saint Catherine Monastery preserve manuscripts and icons collected over its long history.

The dinner was held in honour of the members of the American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation. Former US President George Bush, the group's honourary patron, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also attended.

The heir to the British throne established the Saint Catherine Foundation in London last year, following a 1995 trip to the 1,500-year-old Greek Orthodox monastery located on Egypt's Mount Sinai. The site is considered sacred by Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Cabinet out

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin has dismissed the nation's entire cabinet, save for Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais. Chernomyrdin, who was given seven days to re-organise the cabinet, did not reveal the names of the new cabinet members, but said yesterday that the next government would be one of liberal reformers.

Chubais, a liberal economist and the mastermind of Russia's controversial mass privatisation programme, has been the target of criticism by Yeltsin opponents for selling state assets too cheaply. His recent appointment, therefore, was seen as a snub to the State Duma, the lower house of parliament which is dominated by Yeltsin's communist opponents.

Responding to Yeltsin's cabinet reshuffle, the communists have threatened the government with the possibility of a no-confidence motion. Moreover, trade unions, backed by the communists, are planning a nationwide general strike on 27 March to protest against long delays in payment of wages and pensions. *(see p.6)*

Gulf claims

THE UN Compensation Commission said yesterday that it had paid $144 million to 63 governments, its first payments to victims of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The money will be distributed to 57,636 people who proved they were forced to leave Kuwait or Iraq or who lost up to $100,000 during the war.

Successful claimants, who were *randomly* selected by computer, include Egyptian, Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi workers as well as Kuwaiti citizens who fled their homeland. Payments were funded by the Commission's share of revenue from the sale of Iraqi crude oil.

Under the UN-Iraqi oil-for-food agreement, which came into force last December, Iraq is allowed to sell $2 billion worth of oil every six months. The bulk of the money must be used to provide food and medical supplies for the Iraqi people who have been suffering from the effects of UN economic sanctions imposed in 1990.

So far, no goods have arrived in Iraq, the UN admitted this week.

INSIDE

Salvaging peace

Mubarak's Washington visit was hailed as a success, despite a US veto which the Egyptian president described as "unfortunate", reports **Nevine Khalil** from the American capital. Meanwhile, the US appeared to be putting pressure on Israel







Mubarak consults with world leaders and prominent politicians on his week-long mission to break the impasse in the deadlocked Palestinian-Israeli peace talks



Ties 'unshaken' by US veto

President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Washington came at a delicate time for the troubled peace process — amidst an Israeli construction plan for East Jerusalem and a US veto of a UN Security Council resolution asking Israel to drop the scheme.

But while Cairo and Washington did not see eye-to-eye on the American veto, it did not cast a shadow over Monday's meeting between presidents Mubarak and Clinton, a source close to the talks said.

Mubarak told reporters after meeting with the House International Affairs Committee on Tuesday that the veto would have no impact on the strong ties between Egypt and the United States.

"Nothing like this will shake it," Mubarak said. "I think Egyptian-American relations are really very strong."

At a joint news conference with Clinton that followed their talks on Monday, Mubarak said it was "unfortunate that the resolution was not adopted, because it could have given a signal to the Israelis to stop any settlement activity, especially in the area of Jerusalem, which is illegal."

Clinton said that, despite the veto, "we have made it clear we do not agree with Israel's decision." What the United States is trying to do, he said, is to reach a point "where the parties themselves can honestly make a fair, just and lasting peace."

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif said yesterday that Mubarak hoped that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "would realise the delicate nature of the situation and show flexibility in order to contain it."

The source close to the talks said that although Egypt "does not accept the reasons put forward by the US for the veto, President Mubarak's talks were not affected."

Mubarak and Clinton held "very long, good, detailed discussions" about ways of resuming the stalled peace negotiations between Syria and Israel, the source said, but no formula for restarting the talks materialised. Egypt and the United States will pursue ideas with both parties until a formula is reached. Syria, with Mubarak's backing, wants the talks to resume from the point where they had stopped.

"We believe it's important and we believe that there is a potential that the parties could reach across the ground that divides them," Clinton said.

Mubarak was the third Middle Eastern leader to meet with Clinton in the space of two months. Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat visited Washington separately ahead of Mubarak and he will be followed by Jordan's King Hussein and Morocco's King Hassan.

El-Sherif reported that Mubarak told congressional leaders that Egypt "does not put pressure, and is not ready to be a tool of pressure for imposing ideas or proposals that are not in line with the principles of a just and comprehensive peace."

Mubarak got a warm reception on Tuesday from US congressional leaders. "We are always eager to visit with President Mubarak. He is a pillar of strength in the Middle East," House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich said.

Gingrich and House International Relations Committee Chairman Ben Gilman, a New York Republican, indicated support for continued US aid to Egypt, averaging around $2 billion a year. "A prosperous, stable Egypt is absolutely essential," Gingrich, a Georgia Republican, said.

Some of the congressional leaders complained of what they described as an anti-Israel campaign in the Egyptian press. According to El-Sherif, Mubarak responded that the "Egyptian press is exercising complete and unlimited freedom. The major national newspapers are not subject to government control but have complete independence... The government respects the freedom of the press and cannot interfere with what it publishes."

According to the source, Mubarak allayed fears of congressional leaders that Egypt might be holding up the peace process by advising the Palestinians to delay decisions. US officials have come to the conclusion that Egypt would continue to back the Palestinians because, aside from other considerations, it serves Cairo's interests to do so. "I believe the Americans accept this," the Egyptian source said, "because of Netanyahu's hardline policies."

Clinton, emphasising the importance of the Egyptian role, said that peace efforts "cannot succeed without the leadership of Egypt." Clinton added that his talks with Mubarak "deepened our understanding and partnership, our determination to coordinate our efforts even more closely and to encourage the parties to tackle the tough questions ahead."

Mubarak's visit also served to further strengthen economic relations between the two countries. Clinton praised Egypt's "economic advances," saying that the Presidents' Council "has achieved dramatic success, increasing trade and investments between our nations and deepening support for necessary economic reforms."

With Mubarak and Vice President Al Gore co-chairing the Presidents' Council yesterday, discussions focused on technology transfer from the US to Egypt, the creation of free trade zones, patent rights and upgrading the Egyptian stock market.

Mubarak is scheduled to address the business community today during a trip to Chicago. *(see p.3)*

American squeeze

THE UNITED States was reported yesterday to be pressing Israel to delay construction in disputed East Jerusalem and make other concessions to the Palestinians in the hope of averting a collapse of the Middle East peace process.

A US diplomat said the Clinton administration would raise the issue of the construction of Jewish homes in East Jerusalem again with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

"We have said that we were unhappy with the decision," Edward Abington, the consul general in Jerusalem, told The Associated Press. However, he stopped short of saying that the United States would ask that the project be delayed. Abington added that the US would seek other Israeli goodwill gestures, including a more generous housing policy for the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem.

The US has also sided with the Palestinians in a new dispute over Yasser Arafat's decision to invite foreign diplomats to the Gaza Strip this weekend to hear his complaints about recent Israeli decisions.

Abington said he would attend the conference on Saturday even though Israel had complained that such a gathering violated the autonomy agreements which stipulate that disputes must be resolved in a way agreed by both sides.

Netanyahu complained yesterday that Arafat has refused to take his phone calls — his most recent reported attempt to talk to the Palestinian leader was on Tuesday night. "If he doesn't want to talk, we can't force him," Netanyahu said from Russia, where he was ending a state visit.

The Palestinians have been angered by several Israeli decisions this month. They include the approval of plans to build 6,500 apartments for Jews in East Jerusalem, the section of the city which Palestinians claim as their future capital, and a decision to withdraw troops from only nine per cent of the West Bank — an area one third of what the Palestinians had expected to receive at this time.

Saturday's conference in Gaza City is to be attended by diplomats from the United States, Russia, the European Union, Japan, Norway, Jordan and Egypt. Arafat said the meeting had been called "to protect the peace process."

Visions of October

Who should write the script of a film on the 1973 October War, Nasserists or Sadatists? **Gamal Essam El-Din** investigates a controversy

As the nation prepares to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the October 1973 War next year, a controversy has been simmering in the pages of the Arabic-language press, and in political and intellectual circles, about who should put together the story and write the script of a film commemorating the war. This week, Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi stepped into the debate, denying that the ministry had designated a certain writer for this task. Tantawi's denial was contained in a letter to the Cultural Committee of the People's Assembly in response to a written question directed by Mohamed El-Messeiri, a deputy from the Nile Delta province of Al-Daqahliya.

El-Messeiri had objected to a decision, which the Arabic-language press claimed had been taken by the Defence Ministry, commissioning well-known scriptwriter Osama Anwar Okasha for the job. "How can this person be trusted by the Defence Ministry, when his previous work downplayed the leading and historic role played by the late President Anwar Sadat in launching the glorious October War?" El-Messeiri asked in his letter.

The defence minister responded that, contrary to press reports, the general command of the armed forces had not chosen a specific writer for the task. "The armed forces command, motivated by keenness to commemorate the October War, has communicated with a number of writers and literary figures, urging them to submit works on the October War," Tantawi wrote in his reply. He added that the armed forces had formed a number of committees to examine these works to ensure they conformed to historical facts and were free of personal bias.

According to Tantawi, the works which have been submitted so far do not adequately reflect "the greatness of this war." Therefore, the ministry had announced on more than one occasion that it was still seeking other works on the war, he said.

The campaign against Okasha was launched by a weekly newspaper, which argued that his pro-Nasser, anti-Sadat sympathies made him the last person who should be entrusted with the job of retelling the story of '73. These sympathies were very much in evidence in his highly popular television soap opera, *Layali Al-Hilmiyeh* (Nights of Al-Hilmiyeh).

Okasha responded to the campaign by saying that his pro-Nasserist sympathies did not give newspapers "the right to pass advance judgement on the proposed story and script." His story, he said, would focus on "the role of Egyptian soldiers in this war."

El-Messeiri seized upon this statement to conclude that Okasha's version of events would ignore Sadat's role in the war. "Focusing the story on soldiers means that the basic role of President Sadat will be completely ignored," El-Messeiri told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The furore continued unabated as further press reports alleged that Tantawi had commissioned Anis Mansour, a popular writer and *Al-Ahram* columnist, and historian Gamal Hammad to produce stories to be made into films about the war. Nasserist newspapers responded by accusing Mansour and Hammad of bias because of their "well-known anti-Nasserist sentiments." The reports also claimed that Hossameddin Mustafa, a film director who visited Israel in 1994, had been chosen to direct the film, and that Lenin El-Ramli would write the script.

It was these conflicting reports and rumours which prompted El-Messeiri to direct his question to Tantawi. El-Messeiri stressed that his opposition to Okasha did not mean he was seeking a Sadatist viewpoint for the film, but merely an unbiased one. "The story should be written neither by Nasserists nor Sadatists," he said. "A number of prominent historians and script writers should be brought together to draw the broad lines of the story to ensure impartiality and truth."

At a meeting on Monday, members of the Assembly's Cultural Committee quickly split into Nasserist and Sadatist camps. Alluding to Okasha, El-Messeiri insisted that "the state should not entrust a person known to the majority of Egyptians for his anti-Sadatist bias with writing the story of the war."

But Mansour Abdel-Rahman, a deputy for the Cairo district of Shubra, argued that Okasha should not be classified as a Nasserist. "And even if he is, I don't know why a Nasserist should be barred from writing the story for a film on the October War. Nasser himself contributed to the war, which was really an extension of the achievements of his era."

Fayda Kamel, who has praised the Nasserist revolution in the past, lauded Okasha and his abilities. "Why should an efficient and capable scriptwriter like him be barred from writing the story?" she asked.

The committee's chairman, Salah El-Taruti, intervened to emphasise that "the final decision rests with the Defence Ministry, which has already established committees to examine the proposed stories."

Dorreya Sharafeddin, a film critic who serves as an adviser to the committee, insisted that all writers, regardless of their political views, should be given the opportunity to contribute to commemorating the war. "Let me tell you that, personally, I am anti-Nasser. But you should also know that Okasha should not be penalised for his political views," she said. "The Defence Ministry has invited writers from a wide political spectrum to contribute their works to the event, so that it will be able to produce at least three films about the war by next year."

Hanaa Gabra, an appointed MP, commented: "The world does not care about Nasserists and Sadatists, but it does care about how we will be able to convey through film a realistic and reasonable view of this war," she said. "The film should not show us victorious from beginning to end and should not imply that we made no mistakes."

'Intellectual' encounter with Netanyahu

Binyamin Netanyahu had an unprecedented meeting with a group of Egyptian intellectuals during his visit to Cairo last week. Jailan Halawi and Nevine Khalil report



With the government's blessing, nine Egyptian intellectuals met with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu during his visit to Cairo on 5 March to convey public displeasure with his hardline policies.

The obstacles facing the peace process and bilateral relations topped the agenda of the meeting — the first of its kind — which lasted for over an hour at Al-Tahra presidential palace. The conversation touched on Jerusalem, Netanyahu's decision to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem, the stalled negotiations on the Syrian track and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Egyptian participants also brought up the prime minister's perception of the Arabs, which they regard as negative, and his negative interpretation of the principles of peace.

Several intellectuals turned down invitations to the meeting, and none of those who signed the Copenhagen Declaration, setting up an international alliance for Arab-Israeli peace, was present.

Writer Lutfi El-Kholi, one of the Declaration's signatories, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he had not been invited. "Even if I were, I would have declined," he said. "I would have refused to attend, not only as an Egyptian citizen, but also as a signatory of the Copenhagen Declaration whose basic principles reject Israel's settlement policies and expropriation of Palestinian land."

However, Osama El-Ghazali Harb, chief editor of Al-Ahram's *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya* (International Politics) journal, did attend, believing that Egypt's interests would be served both by those who attended and those who refused the invitation. "Both sides are needed to *put our point across*," he told the *Weekly*. He stressed the importance of maintaining a dialogue: "We want to reach peace by peaceful means, presenting arguments and talking. Dialogue is the only option because using military force to make peace is out of the question."

At the meeting, Harb questioned Netanyahu's previous statements on the need for Arab governments to educate their people in "the culture of peace." He told the prime minister: "How can you speak of this in such a discouraging atmosphere. The people should feel the peace; otherwise intellectuals would be brainwashing them to accept settlements and oppression."

The Israeli press and media had opened fire against Egypt for supporting the Palestinians during the negotiations on redeployment from Hebron, Harb continued. "Did you expect Egypt not to support Palestine? Is any Arab or national role played by Egypt necessarily against Israel?" he asked.

Mohamed Abdellah, head of the *Foreign Relations Committee of the* People's Assembly, also attended. It had, he said, been an important meeting because it gave Netanyahu the opportunity to listen directly to what Egyptian public opinion had to say about his policies. "Most of the speakers affirmed Egypt's sincere intention to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, whereby stability and development could be maintained," Abdellah said. "We wanted him to understand that his policies made us worry about the peace process and that the situation would deteriorate if he continued to act in this superior manner." His condescending tone in addressing the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, "makes cooperation seem as if it were a sort of domination," Abdellah added.

Another well-known thinker, leftist writer Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, did not attend. While supporting the principle of dialogue with Israel, he did not approve of the Copenhagen Declaration and indicated that he was unwilling to meet Netanyahu because the present time was not "*propitious.*" Sid-Ahmed said Egyptian intellectuals should have been more cautious, and "should have played this card at a later date, in better times. They should not have hurried as soon as Netanyahu summoned them with his little finger."

Such meetings would not result in any change in Netanyahu's polices, he added. "President Clinton could not change his [Netanyahu's] mind, so will the Egyptians?" Sid-Ahmed asked.

Harb, on the other hand, believes that Netanyahu has shown himself capable of backtracking on his rhetoric and changing his position. "Consequently, it was about time we *talked to him face-to-face*," he said.

Ahmed Fakhr, a retired army general who now heads the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, also believes in the value of a face-to-face encounter. He said he had attended to convey one message to Netanyahu — "Everything you did since taking over the prime minister's post is completely opposed by all sections of Egyptian society."

Also attending was Sabri El-Shabrawi, a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo (AUC), who told Netanyahu that Egyptians refuse to be addressed in the prime minister's superior tone. "I told him that a country with our history, resources and potential refuses this categorically," El-Shabrawi said. He said he told him he was not threatening. "I only want you to know that unless you resolve the problem of settlements, you are bound to lose eventually."

Hala Mustafa, a researcher at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said she attended in order to ask Netanyahu, who opposes *the establishment* of a Palestinian state, about his position on the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Another important question, Mustafa said, was: "If you are so hawkish on all tracks — Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian — how do you view the possibility of pushing forward the peace process, given that the Arabs are determined to stick to the full implementation of the land-for-peace formula?"

In response to the participants' comments, Netanyahu expressed admiration for Egypt's role in pushing forward the peace process and praised the nation's economic achievements.

The prime minister said he wanted to clear up any misunderstanding of his position on Islam, and stressed that he does not regard Muslims or Palestinians as second-class citizens. He also affirmed commitment to the Oslo agreements and to peace, but added: "I am also responsible for the security of Israel, whose people elected me for this purpose."

In conclusion, Netanyahu praised the meeting as "the right way of exchanging views to reach the best results."

Netanyahu's visit was condemned by the leftist Tagammu and Democratic Nasserist parties. "Netanyahu, the enemy of peace and the Arabs, is not welcome," Tagammu said in a statement. The Nasserist Party said it was "shocked to hear of the visit. Neither Netanyahu nor any Zionist is welcome on Arab soil until the return of all the Palestinian people to their land."



STUDENTS PROTEST: Hundreds of Islamist, Nasserist and leftist students at Cairo University abandoned their traditional rivalry and staged on-campus demonstrations over the past few days protesting Israel's suppression of the Palestinian people and its policy of establishing settlements in occupied Arab territories, reports **Mohamed Habib**. The students shouted slogans opposing the normalisation of relations with Israel and burned an Israeli flag. The demonstrations began on 5 March, when Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu visited Cairo, and continued this week.

Fracas at the Bar

Islamist lawyers gatecrashed a news conference by two court-appointed custodians of the Bar Association, forcing the pair to withdraw. Mona El-Nahhas reports

Two court-appointed custodians of the Bar Association, Ahmed Reda and Mohamed El-Mahdi, summoned a news conference on Sunday to expose the alleged financial irregularities committed by the syndicate's Islamist-controlled council which had been dissolved nearly a year ago. Anticipating trouble, the two spoke to journalists in a room, which was locked from the inside, at the Association's downtown headquarters.

For nearly half an hour, they spoke about the alleged malpractices of the dissolved council and boasted of the achievements made by the Association as a result of sequestration. But then they were interrupted by heavy knocks on the door. After initial hesitation, they opened the door and dozens of angry lawyers, Islamists and their sympathisers, walked in. They insisted that they too should be given the opportunity to address the journalists.

The custodians attempted to calm them down, but failed. The gate-crashers shouted to the custodians not to utter a word about the dissolved council unless they presented documents to prove their claim. They also accused Ahmed Reda, one of the two custodians, of committing even graver financial irregularities when he served on the Association's council in the past. The custodians had no choice but to withdraw.

The Association, dominated for the past four years by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, was placed under judicial sequestration last April in response to a lawsuit filed by a group of non-Islamist lawyers. Those claimed that the Islamist members of the Association's council had committed serious financial irregularities.

The Abdin Court of First Instance, which issued the sequestration order, appointed three custodians to run the Association's financial affairs until a new elected council takes over. The post of the first custodian, Ahmed El-Khawaga, the Association's elected chairman, became vacant after his death last December. The court will decide on 29 March who will be his successor.

Ahmed Reda, a former council member, replaced the second custodian, Selim El-Awwa, after the latter decided to withdraw in December. The post of the third custodian, Mohamed El-Mahdi, remained in the same hands.

Many lawyers of various political affiliations had hoped that the sequestration would be short-lived and that elections for a new council would be held last September. Describing the situation in the Association as "very critical," Kamal Khaled, a lawyer and former member of the People's Assembly, charged that a judicial committee in charge of setting a date for the elections was procrastinating. "I asked the head of the committee to start the nomination procedures but he turned a deaf ear to my request," Khaled said. "I considered his silence a negative position and took him to court. The court ruled in my favour last December but the implemenation of its decision was delayed as a result of a counter-lawsuit."

Khaled, an independent, appeared to be taking the side of the dissolved council. "If the council was proven to be guilty," he said, "legal action should have been taken against them. Any violations committed by the council were minor. The case has a political dimension because of the hostility between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood."

While the majority of lawyers are pressing for new elections, the custodians are satisfied with the current situation, claiming that the sequestration benefited the Association. "The custodians achieved a lot in the past year and they need more time to complete their fruitful projects," El-Mahdi told the news conference. "When we took over, the treasury was empty and the Association's bank accounts were zero. We managed to repay all the Association's debts, which exceeded LE6 million, and realised liquid assets with a total value of LE4 million."

El-Mahdi went on: "In case of a new council, these assets will not be safe and the violations committed by the Islamist council may be repeated. Elections should be held only after the money is invested in projects that will yield a good revenue."

Ahmed Reda said that sequestration is a temporary situation that will end soon after the situation in the Association "returns to normal." He added that the custodians planned to file a complaint with prosecution authorities, to which will be attached the latest report of the Central Auditing Agency, about the large amounts of money which were misspent by the dissolved council. For the past two years, prosecutors have been investigating similar complaints filed by anti-Islamist lawyers.

Heliopolis syndrome hits Ramses building

While the tenants and owner of a central Cairo building slug it out in court, engineers carrying out repairs insist that fears that the block is about to collapse are unfounded. Jailan Halawi reports

Construction engineers have ruled out the possibility that a large building in downtown Cairo, known as the Ramses Building, is on the verge of collapse. Rumours began circulating a few weeks ago that the building, owned by the Misr Insurance Company, was in danger, because cracks had appeared on the structure-supporting pillars. The 18-storey block was built in 1957 over an area of 1,250 square metres. It includes around 1,000 apartments, clinics and offices, and a branch of the Central Bank on the ground floor.

It is the presence of a Central Bank branch in the building which was largely responsible for sparking off the rumours. The Central Bank also had an office on the ground floor of the Heliopolis building which collapsed last October, killing 64 people. It was suggested at the time that refurbishment work in the bank had destroyed or damaged supporting pillars and caused the collapse.

But engineers from the Arab Contractors Company (ACC) working on the Ramses Building say that the comparison is unwarranted. According to Chief Engineer Atef Osman, the ACC was commissioned by the Misr Insurance Company to examine and reinforce the supporting pillars in the Central Bank office after cracks appeared on some of them. Osman said the cracks were caused by leakage from the building's water pipes and sewage system. "In the long run, this would definitely affect the foundations of the building unless immediately and properly dealt with," he said.

According to Sherif Abdel-Rehim, another consultant engineer, the leakage caused the building's foundations to sink slightly which, in turn, resulted in the pillars cracking. "Thank God, the foundations are strong and we have time to study and save the situation," he said.

Tenants blame the leakage on the owner company's delay in carrying out necessary repair work The company rejects this allegation and charges that the tenants refuse to pay their share of the costs.

Wadie Fahim, a tenant, said that he and other tenants had complained repeatedly to the owner over the past three years about damaged water pipes and lifts breaking down. "We asked the owners to act but never received a reply," he said.

The despairing tenants then filed a lawsuit against Misr Insurance. The court referred their complaints to a court-appointed custodian. "But he took no action whatsever," another tenant said.

Fahim said he also sent complaints to the municipal authorities — the Cairo governorate and Abdin district — "but I received no reply. Nobody showed up, even to investigate."

Not true, said Naguib Naim, head of the real estate department at Misr Insurance. Both the Cairo governorate and Misr Insurance, he said, had acted promptly after the Central Bank branch reported cracks on the pillars. "The governorate immediately ordered the evacuation of the branch and Misr Insurance commissioned the Arab Contractors Company, which is highly respected for its efficiency, to reinforce the building," Naim said.

Legal battles between the tenants and the owners date back to 1980, when tenants filed a lawsuit accusing Misr Insurance of failure to maintain water pumps and lifts properly. In 1981, the building was placed under the supervision of a court-appointed custodian, responsible for rent collection and maintenance work.

Naim said that, according to the law, tenants should pay two thirds of the cost of repairs. "But this never happened. They agreed to pay only five per cent of the amount and we filed counter lawsuits."

Naim lamented the fact that although the owner company does not receive any substantial revenue from the building, it has to pay for maintenance and the wages of 10 porters and administrative employees. "Why don't the tenants fulfil their duties before they ask for their rights?" he asked. "The owner is the victim who is held responsible for anything that goes wrong, although he is denied his rights."

Now Misr Insurance will have to pay the Arab Contractors for the repairs and then file a lawsuit to recoup two thirds of the costs from the tenants. "This may drag on in the courts for five years," Naim said.

Maj. Gen. Ahmed Sultan, deputy governor for Western Cairo, claimed he has never received any complaints from the tenants. "The only report I have received was from the Abdin district municipal authority two weeks ago, stating that there were problems with the sewage system," he said. "A committee visited the building but discovered that repairs were already being carried out. Had there been anything serious, the building would have been evacuated immediately. We do not gamble with people's lives."

Maj. Gen. Ahmed Kadri, chief of the Abdin municipal authority, also maintained that building safety was a top priority. "We cannot be lax in enforcing the law, particularly where the lives of innocent people are concerned," he said.

Repairs were already under way, Kadri pointed out. "Our job comes next. We'll send a team of engineers to make sure that the necessary work has been 100 per cent accomplished."

Satanic storm in a teacup

THE CASE against the so-called devil-worshippers appears to have fizzled out after some 90 young people, arrested for alleged involvement in the bizarre cult, were released in batches during the past few weeks.

State Security Prosecutor Hisham Saraya, speaking to **Jailan Halawi**, said the cult does not exist in this country, although he added in the same breath that the case has not been closed.

"Honestly and clearly, Satan has no worshippers in Egypt," Saraya said. He added that tape recordings seized in the young people's possession proved nothing except that they are "reckless, thoughtless youths who, like parrots, chant European songs that are indifferent to religion."

Those young people were not brought up well but they are not devil-worshippers, he said.

No charges were filed against them, Saraya said, because "the law does not penalise any type of thought." However, he added, if there is adequate evidence, some of them may be charged with "propagating extremist thought and holding revealed religion in contempt." The charge is punishable by a prison term ranging from six months to five years and a fine of LE500.

Saraya said the press coverage of the case was "exaggerated" and "did not reflect the true facts of the investigation."

The press, he said, became "hysterical. Reporters wished to obtain fresh news every day but the prosecutor provided them with nothing." So, they collected information about the actions of Satan-worshippers abroad and "related it to those who were taken into custody," he said.

According to Saraya, the case is not over yet. "The investigation is continuing. The prosecutor is hearing the testimony of witnesses and watching and/or listening to the confiscated tapes."

Saraya said that taking someone into custody does not mean that he has been convicted. "This is a precautionary measure that serves the investigation. But after the suspects were questioned and the prosecutor found that their release would cause no harm, there was no reason to keep them in custody."



Romancing the stone

A MAN digging the foundation for his prospective home in the Nile Delta uncovered a unique Pharaonic statue probably dating back between 3,000 and 3,500 years, the Supreme Council for Antiquities said on Monday.

The "exceptional work of art" in beige limestone shows a woman seated in a chair with two girls and a boy held to her chest and a third girl on her knees, Council secretary-general Ali Hassan said.

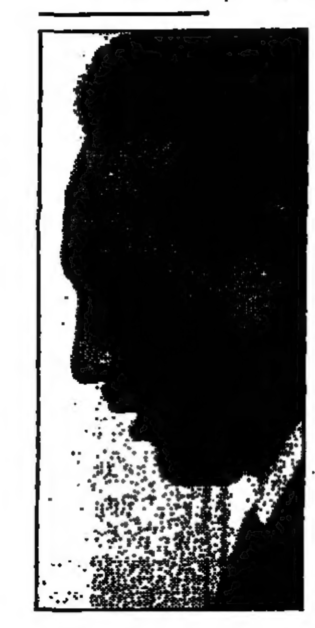
The statue, 95 centimetres high and 25 centimetres wide, probably dates back to the New Kingdom [1580-1085 BC], Hassan told a news conference.

The statue was uncovered in Zagazig, 85km north of Cairo, 300 metres west of a temple of *Pepi I*. The location of the statue near the Old Kingdom temple has no special significance, Hassan said, adding that it was probably moved from its original place and hidden near the Zagazig temple by someone who planned to retrieve it later.

The piece is a "unique sculpture," Hassan said. "The artist who carved the statue is a first-class or royal artist." He said it was unusual to find a statue cut or carved from limestone inlaid with precious stones and that the gems were still there.

The woman was probably a nurse or a priestess linked to the royal family, he said.

Obituary



Broadcasting revolution

GALAL Mua'wwad, a radio announcer closely associated with the 1952 Revolution, died of heart failure on 5 March at the age of 67. He had been rushed to the EgyptAir hospital five days earlier, suffering from acute bronchitis.

Mua'wwad, who served as a Radio Cairo announcer for over 20 years, was known for his devotion to the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and for his close connections with Umm Kalthoum and Abdel-Halim Hafez, two of the country's leading singers and symbols of national identity. He is most famous for broadcasting some of the initial communiqués issued by the Free Officers after they seized power on 23 July 1952, including the communiqué announcing the overthrow of King Farouk three days later.

His connection with the post-revolutionary government continued through *Personality of the Week*, a radio programme intended to acquaint the public with the 12 members of the Revolution Command Council, led by Nasser. He also accompanied Nasser on trips abroad and was impressed by the warm welcome accorded to the late president, telling a newspaper interviewer: "I never saw a king or president who had this great popularity not only in his home country but anywhere he went." He remembered Nasser's visits to Syria, Tunisia, Morocco and India in particular.

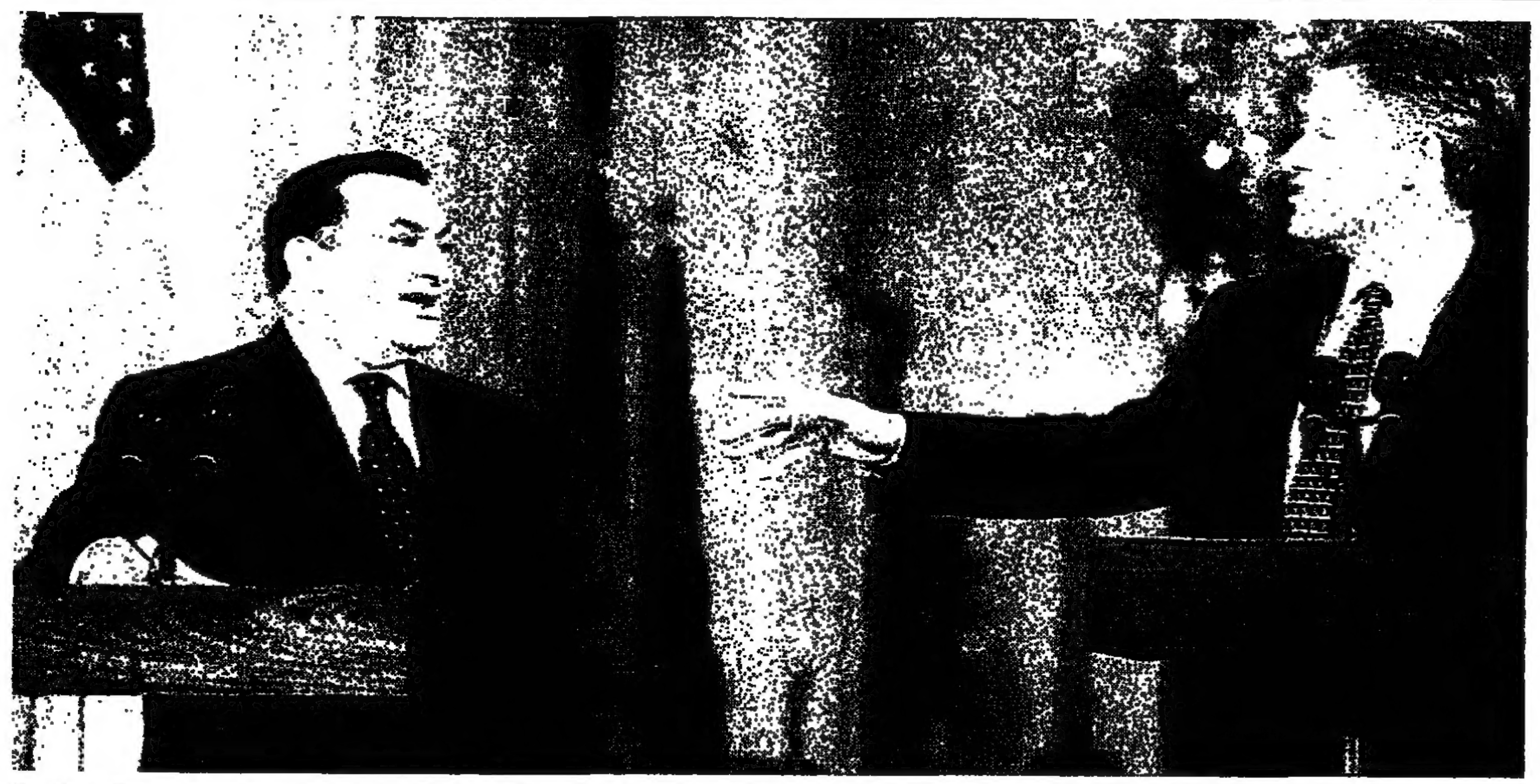
Mua'wwad said he had never loved anyone the way he loved Nasser.

He later travelled with Umm Kalthoum to broadcast the concerts she organised in foreign capitals to raise funds for the military following Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war. He is also remembered for producing and broadcasting a series of popular radio concerts, known as *Lights of the City*, featuring a variety of singers and musicians.

Born on 1 January 1930, Mu'awwad joined Radio Cairo after graduating from Cairo University in 1950. He retired in 1971, following Nasser's death. "I was at the home of composer Mohamed Abdel-Wahab when I was informed by telephone that Nasser had died," Mua'wwad recalled. "I ran through the streets in a pitiable condition until I reached the radio station to broadcast the news of his death. It was the worst piece of news I ever broadcast."

Mua'wwad married actress Leila Fawzi in 1960. He was awarded the order of merit by President Hosni Mubarak in 1990.

هكذا من الأصل


Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Bill Clinton address a joint news conference following their meeting at the White House on Monday *(photo: AFP)*

Washington vetoes the world

A draft resolution urging Israel to desist from its settlement activities is certain to gain overwhelming approval from the UN General Assembly after it was blocked in the Security Council by America's veto. Hoda Tawfik reports from New York

The Arab and European groups of states have decided to take a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly urging Israel to scrap its plan to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem. Last week, the United States used its veto to prevent the Security Council from approving the draft, despite its declared opposition to Israel's policy of building settlements in occupied Arab territories. The US went against the tide of international public opinion, casting the sole "nay" vote, while the 14 other members of the Security Council were in favour of the resolution.

The draft is certain to gain overwhelming approval from the Assembly, although its resolutions do not carry the same weight as the Security Council's resolutions, which are binding.

Sponsored by France, Britain, Portugal and Sweden, the resolution "calls upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which alter the facts on the ground, pre-empting the final status negotiations, and have negative implications for the Middle East peace process."

Israel is planning to build 6,500 housing units for some 30,000 Jews in East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians claim as the capital of their future state. The Palestinians argue that the situation in the holy city should not be changed until its future is determined in the final status negotiations.

The resolution also urges "Israel, the occupying power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians in time of war, of 12 August 1949, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967."

It "calls upon all parties to continue, in the interests of peace and security, their negotiations within the Middle East peace process, on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached."

Egypt's delegate to the UN, Ambassador Nabil El-Arabi, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "We decided, after consultations between the Arab and European groups, to take the resolution to the General Assembly, without any changes, because it is a balanced resolution. It is a statement of facts. It does not condemn or deplore, but states that Israel is the occupying power or authority that occupies the territories. This is a fact, and the resolution aims at supporting the peace process. There is nothing controversial in the resolution."

El-Arabi said the American veto against a "balanced, European" resolution is "not understandable," but he expressed satisfaction that the draft had the support of the rest of the world.

Nabil Fahmi, political adviser to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, told the *Weekly* that "the American veto augments the Palestinians' feeling of injustice shown towards their cause; it also shows how the United States was isolated at the Security Council and casts doubt on its credibility as an honest mediator."

The Palestinians feel that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "can do anything he wants and get away with it, using the pretext that he faces internal difficulties," Fahmi said. "In this way, Netanyahu can dictate, alter facts on the ground."

At a joint news conference with President Hosni Mubarak following their talks on Monday, President Bill Clinton tried hard to defend the American veto but also acknowledged concern for the Arab reaction. He told reporters: "In all candour, I am concerned about damage done by the veto to the US credibility as a Middle East broker."

Clinton said the veto should not be seen as indicative of America's approval of the Israeli government's plan. "It might be seen as encouraging the present Israeli government if we had stated that we were vetoing the resolution because we agreed with Israel's decision, but we have made it clear we do not agree with Israel's decision," Clinton said.

'Back at point zero'

Henry Siegman is a senior fellow for the Middle East peace process on the Council on Foreign Relations. In the following interview with Nevine Khalil, he says Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem has brought the peace process back to square one

The Council on Foreign Relations has for many years worked behind the scenes to help bring divergent viewpoints closer in the peace process. Can you tell us more about your efforts?

I have for many years been involved in moving the peace process forward and to do so, very often through quiet conversation, by trying to overcome political and ideological obstacles and getting the parties to deal with very pragmatic and practical ways of moving this process forward. Very often when you talk about things, that's a sure way of not making things up.

***You will be speaking to President Hosni* Mubarak. What will you tell him about the Har Homa settlement?**

My conversation with President Mubarak is part of an ongoing long-standing relationship. These are not separate, discreet conversations; it's part of an on-going dialogue that we have. The president knows that I consider any action by any of the parties which tends to prejudge issues that should be discussed in the final status negotiations is very harmful to the peace process.

I consider that what has happened in recent weeks to be very unfortunate — in a sense doubly unfortunate. Meaning that I thought that the Hebron agreement was of tremendous importance and not fully appreciated in much of the Arab world. Because it meant that the other half in Israel — those who identify with the Likud — for the first time embraced, maybe not whole-heartedly, maybe reluctantly, but effectively the Oslo Accords.

This should have yielded certain benefits to the peace process. It should have built a new sense of trust and a new sense of confidence. Unfortunately, what has happened now in Jerusalem has washed away all the benefits that the Hebron agreement created and deserved. [Har Homa] is destructive on its own terms, but more than that it did away with the good feelings the Hebron agreement should have created. So we're back at point zero, and that's not a good thing. It's very, very sad.

And what are your thoughts on the US veto of the draft Security Council resolution condemning Israel's settlement activity in East Jerusalem?

I thought the US should have abstained, should not have vetoed, or should have come up with language for a resolution that it found acceptable. The president said that the resolution contained language that the US could not approve, that's perfectly legitimate, but then the US had an obligation to try and fashion a resolution that it could live with.

Quite clearly, the perception that exists in the Arab world that the US is an advocate of the Israeli cause was profoundly reinforced by this veto, and I don't think it is helpful to the cause of the peace process.

I think it is important that the US is an advocate of Israel, but it has to prove to the Arab world that its advocacy of Israel does not come at the cost of such one-sidedness, that it alienates everyone else in the region. I think the veto damaged that perception.

At the time of Prime Minister Netanyahu's election, you said we should give him time to prove his support of peace. What do you think of his policies now?

I thought when he signed the Hebron accords, that this vindicated the point I was making, that if given a chance he will do the right thing. He would not do it with the same enthusiasm that [the late Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin and [former Prime Minister Shimon] Peres did, may not do it for the same motivation, but that he will finally realise there are no other options.

I think that is what happened. That is why I find it so sad. What happened subsequently denied him the credit for it.

Do you believe there is still hope for the peace process?

Yes, I continue to believe there is hope, because I think in this case there simply are no alternatives that are remotely acceptable.

The council is sponsoring a French-American dialogue along with the French foreign ministry in Paris next month. How do you see a European role in the peace process?

I think Europe must have a role. This is not to replace the American role, but it has a role that can be complementary and supportive of the peace process.

One cannot say to the Europeans that you have an obligation to pay the bill, but when it comes to anything beyond that we are not interested in what you have to say. Europe can play a helpful role if there is closer coordination between Europe and the US, with regard to the peace process. There is a community of interest, of shared policy concerns and Europe is affected by what goes on in the Middle East. There is a geographic and strategic closeness which concerns the Europeans in a very real way. The United States sees Europe as an asset, not as a threat.



Washington via Paris

ON HIS way to Washington, President Hosni Mubarak stopped in Paris last Friday for talks with President Jacques Chirac on Egyptian and French efforts to realise a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Mubarak told reporters after the talks that the peace process was facing "difficult times but is not on the verge of collapse. We have to take into account the likelihood that the process will be confronted by obstacles but, with a strong will, and by giving a push to the process, we will reach a solution."

Egyptian and French positions on supporting "just rights" were identical, Mubarak said. Chirac concurred that there was a "complete agreement of viewpoints" on the peace process, bilateral relations and international questions. "Everything that President Mubarak said, I could have said," he added.

A Chirac spokesman said the decision of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem prompted concern regarding his commitment to the peace process. Praising Mubarak as a peace pioneer, the spokesman confirmed that Egypt and France were in agreement that peace between Israel and the Arab states should be "just and comprehensive." He added that Chirac had stressed the importance of evolving "balanced methods to save the peace process from its current stagnation" in his discussion with Mubarak. On the Egyptian side, Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif confirmed Egypt's and France's identical position on the basic principles of the peace process, including support for the just rights of the Palestinian people. Ali Maher, the Egyptian ambassador in Paris, described the Mubarak-Chirac talks as "successful and positive."

During the talks, Chirac assured Mubarak of France's support for Egypt in its current negotiations with the European Union to conclude a partnership agreement. The two presidents also dealt with bilateral relations, which were described as "warm and profound," the situation in Africa, particularly the conflicts raging in the Great Lakes region, and the situation in Algeria and the Gulf. *(photo: Reuters)*

'Stop Har Homa'

ON THE eve of his meeting with President Bill Clinton, President Hosni Mubarak said he would ask the American leader to put pressure on Israel to reverse its decision to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem.

"I'm going to ask the president to use his influence to stop this. He could persuade the Israelis to recognise the realities of the situation," Mubarak said in an interview with Cable News Network [CNN] on Sunday.

The establishment of the Jewish neighbourhood could "explode the whole peace process," he warned.

"It's going to make future negotiations complicated, it will be a big problem," he said.

And he added that the Israeli action could spark a flare-up of violence. "It could result in violence. I'm concerned about the stability of the area."

A US veto of a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Israeli action was unfortunate and had cost the United States credibility with the Arabs, said Mubarak.

"The people of the Arab world have an idea that the United States is a fair partner in the peace process," he said.

The veto will change this belief and create a feeling that the United States is unjust, he added.

Although UN resolutions do not often influence policy in the Middle East, withholding the US veto would have at least signalled to the Israelis that they should cancel the project, the Egyptian president explained.

He also said that he believed Syria was ready to resume peace negotiations with Israel but that President Hafez Al-Assad wanted the talks to re-start from the point which had been reached with the former Labour government of Yitzhak Rabin and his successor, Shimon Peres.

Syria and Israel were on the way to reaching an agreement based on the principle of land-for-peace when Peres lost the elections and Binyamin Netanyahu took over last summer. But such agreements, Mubarak added, take a long time to negotiate.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram Weekly

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Bulldozing the peace process

Israel would like Palestinians to lower their expectations. The Palestinians refuse to do so. **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, and **Tarek Hassan**, in Gaza, report on an impasse that may lead to the destruction of the Middle East peace process



Israeli soldiers forcibly evict local and foreign photographers from the site of clashes between the troops and Palestinans trying to prevent the opening of a road for Jewish settlers. At least ten Palestinians were injured by Israeli soldiers after they tried to stop Jewish settlers from bulldozing nearby land *(photo: AFP)*

After a grueling seven-hour debate, the Israeli cabinet agreed on 7 March to transfer a further nine per cent of the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority (PA). This is the first of the three re-deployments Israel is obligated to make under Oslo's 1995 interim and 1997 Hebron agreements. The US welcomed the move. It is "a demonstration of Israel's commitment to the peace process," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns. Other US officials added that they hoped Israel would be "more generous" in the next two pull-backs slated for October 1997 and March 1998. If the Americans were pleased with the decision, they are among the few who were.

Seven of Israel's cabinet ministers voted against the decision, including Likud members of Knesset (parliament) Ariel Sharon and Limor Livnat. Eight other pro-Likud members of parliament have threatened to vote with the Labour-led opposition in a no-confidence motion tabled in the Knesset for next week. This threat, if implemented, could bring about the fall of the Likud government. Binyamin Netanyahu's response to such warnings was to trade like with like. If the dissident parliamentarians do not like the decision, "they can join a national unity government," he said.

The dissidents' anger has been stirred not just by the extent of the redeployment (which is larger than they expected), but also by the kind of land to be transferred. Two of the nine per cent will come from Area C, that is, the 73 per cent of the West Bank currently under full Israeli control. According to Israel's Infrastructure Minister Sharon, Israel must keep all this territory as a "bargaining chip" for Oslo's final status negotiations, due to start on 17 March.

The cabinet decision has irked Israelis like Sharon. But it has infuriated the Palestinians and for the same reasons. If only two per cent of the redeployment involves new lands, this means that seven per cent (comprising some 200,000 Palestinians in 50 villages near the West Bank towns of Jenin, Ramallah and Hebron) is already under the PA's civilian control. This territory will now pass to the PA's security control, with the result that the PA's overall base in the West Bank is still less than 10 per cent.

Combined with Israel's decision last month to build a new Jewish settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in occupied East Jerusalem and its move to close four Palestinian offices in the city for their alleged links to the PA, most Palestinians see the redeployment decision as utterly derisory. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat went further still. The "decision comes in the context of Netanyahu's planned campaign to destroy the peace process," he said.

At a meeting with their Israeli counterparts on 9 March, Palestinian negotiators formally rejected the redeployment, together with Israel's decisions on Jebel Abu Ghneim and the offices in Jerusalem. On his return to Gaza, chief Palestinian negotiator, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), tendered his resignation on the grounds that the redeployment contradicts an understanding he had reached with Israel that the first redeployment would grant the Palestinians up to 30 per cent of the West Bank.

Yasser Arafat refused to accept the resignation. However, he ordered the PA not to comply with the redeployment. He has also supported Abu Mazen's claim that Israel's decision represents "a grave violation of the agreements." The Palestinians' problem is whether the decision really is a violation of the agreements. Nowhere in Oslo's interim agreement is it specified how much land Israel must transfer to the PA in the first two redeployments. Following the Hebron agreement, the US stated that the scale of redeployments is an Israeli rather than an Israeli-Palestinian decision. The only condition in the agreement is that the redeployment must be from Area C. Netanyahu can argue that he has fulfilled this condition.

According to PA sources, Palestinian anger is not only about the size of the Israeli redeployment. It also has to do with the wholly unilateral manner in which Israel made the decision. "We don't have negotiations with Likud," says Erakat. Rather, "Netanyahu negotiates with his coalition partners and then imposes the decision on us. It is unacceptable."

A deeper fear underlies Palestinian outrage. According to the interim agreement, by the end of the third redeployment (set now for August 1998) the Israeli army should withdraw from all of the West Bank except for Jerusalem, the border areas, the settlements and "specified military locations". This, says the PA, means that 80 to 90 per cent of the West Bank should be in Palestinian hands before the close of Oslo's final status negotiations in May 1999. What Netanyahu is signalling with the first redeployment is that the PA will not get anywhere near this amount of land and that, in the words of his Foreign Minister David Levy, the Palestinians "should lower their expectations."

Neither Arafat nor the Palestinians are prepared to lower their expectations for the moment. Following a stormy meeting of the PA cabinet-PLO executive committee on 8 March, demands were made that the PA suspend the peace process, escalate popular protests and end all security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.

Arafat, so far, has resisted these pressures. His main offensive remains diplomatic. In this, he has been aided by Jordan's King Hussein who, in a furious "personal letter" dispatched to Netanyahu on 10 March, accused the Israeli leader of "destroying everything" he "believes in or has striven to achieve." The next day, Arafat invited the sponsors of the peace process to a meeting this weekend in Gaza to air Palestinian concerns. The US has welcomed the move. The Israeli government has not. At a hastily arranged press conference on 11 March, Foreign Minister Levy declared that any "outside intervention" would force Israel to freeze the Oslo process.

Palestinian anger is escalating over the deadlock *in negotiations with the Israelis due to Israel's* settlement policies and refusal to increase the area of redeployment of its troops from the West Bank in the next phase of Israeli withdrawal.

Tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have risen *since* Israel's decision to build a new Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim in occupied East Jerusalem. So far, Palestinian reaction to the settlement decision has been restrained and cautious, despite the Palestinian Authority's (PA) objection to what it called Israel's "unilateral" measure and its "attempt to determine the future of the disputed city" before final status negotiations start later this month. Palestinian frustration increased even further following President Yasser Arafat's return from his visit to the US when Israel ordered the closure of four Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem.

Arafat said this week that the talks with the Israelis are in a real crisis and described Israel's decision to pull back from only nine per cent of the West Bank, as opposed to the 30 per cent the Palestinians had expected, as a "trick and a conspiracy against the peace process." Since the decision, Palestinian-Israeli channels of communication have been virtually non-existent. Israel rejected the PA's demand to put a hold on the Israeli government's settlement policy and request to form a joint Palestinian-Israeli legal committee to assess how far the Israeli decisions correspond to signed agreements.

The freeze in communication is reflected in the morale of the Palestinian officials. Palestinian sources say that Israel uses talks to "stonewall" issues rather than as a means to reach a joint solution between the two partners. One Palestinian negotiator complained that *Israel* is setting conditions that would turn us into "Israeli agents. This is a situation that weakens our credibility in the eyes of the Palestinian public."

The impasse in talks has driven a number of senior Palestinian officials to threaten to resign. In a sign of frustration, Mahmoud Abbas, better known as Abu Mazen, chief Palestinian negotiator and secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, threatened to quit as chief negotiator. At the time of writing, there was no official word on the reported resignation of Abu Mazen. However, he told Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy this week in Jerusalem that he would resign.

Similarly, eight other PA ministers said that they *would resign* from their posts if the PA accepts the latest Israeli dictates. Arafat has not approved any resignations and Palestinian sources say that he is not likely to do so. By making these threats, Palestinian officials aim to impress on Israel and the international community in particular, the critical state of the negotiations with the Israelis. It is also an attempt by Palestinian officials to call on the international community to step in and put pressure on Israel to deal with the Palestinians as equal partners and to cease delaying the implementation of signed agreements.

Palestinian officials are busy contacting Arab, regional and international parties to explain the impact of Israel's latest moves. They warn that the Palestinians are gripped in "a state of political and diplomatic paralysis" in their dealings with Israel and that the ultimate and inevitable outcome of this state of affairs will be clashes between the Israelis and the Palestinians, particularly when Israeli bulldozers appear in Jebel Abu Ghneim on 17 March [next Monday]. Palestinian officials are, therefore, sending an urgent appeal to the international community to intensify its efforts before that date to avoid a repetition of the violent clashes that took place between Israeli troops and the Palestinian police last September after a tunnel was opened next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine.

Over the last few days, Palestinians have refused to coordinate with Israel on the transfer of authority in the areas slated for a pullback. Their aim is to make the Israeli government appreciate the danger of its own actions. It is well-known that Palestinian cooperation on security issues is of utmost importance to the Israeli government.

Nowadays, Palestinians continue to organise peaceful yet systematic popular protests against Israeli policies. So far, these protests are restrained but it is difficult to predict what will happen in the future when bulldozers start to move in on Jebel Abu Ghneim, particularly if the deadlock in talks between the Israelis and PA officials continues. Calls for an end to negotiations are escalating as Palestinian frustration in the face of Israeli intransigence grows. The Israelis themselves are apprehensive about what will happen when they start building the settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim and are trying to gauge the nature of Palestinian reaction in advance.

Turkey's spring of discontent

Despite Erbakan's approval of rigid measures to stamp out Islamist activism, observers believe it remains likely that he will be forced out of government. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

The crisis between Islamist Prime Minister Necemettin Erbakan *and top military officials took* another twist this week when he decided to seek a parliamentary debate on the report on anti-secular activities issued by the National Security Council (MGK).

The high-powered council, which liaises between military and civilian leaders, consists of the country's five senior sevice commanders, the president, prime minister and the ministers of defense, interior and foreign affairs.

The move comes just days after Erbakan, Turkey's *first Islamist* premier, accepted the *20*-point MGK report amid calls for the ouster of his eight-month-old coalition government and early elections.

The MGK resolutions were the climax of escalating military anger over statements by Islamist politicians and mayors which challenged the country's deep-rooted secularist traditions.

But Erbakan's conciliatory gesture of signing the document failed to bring about the much-awaited 'peace' between the military and his pro-Islamic Refah Party (RP), according to Ilnur Cevik, a prominent Turkish commentator.

He predicted that Erbakan could well be set for a fight ending in his fall.

"The problem has to be solved by finding some kind of consensus on the values that make this country a secular democratic republic. This means we have to define secularism to the satisfaction of everyone," he wrote in the *Turkish Daily News*.

The MGK list of recommendations, aimed mainly at putting a lid on the rising power and influence of radical Islamic fundamentalists, put Erbakan in a difficult position, with the military on one side and his Welfare Party grassroots on the other.

What was considered most unpalatable for the Islamist leader was his required agreement to the limitation of the numbers of mushrooming religious schools; the introduction of legislation banning the establishment of religion-*based parties or associations; the banning of prolife*rating Muslim sects and orders; and the limitation of financial support to the RP from Islamic business empires which are rapidly becoming a solid prop for Erbakan's party.

Since Refah came to power its followers have been calling for some basic changes in state regulations, including a lift of the ban on women wearing headscarves in official buildings.

Refah has failed to meet their demands and has angered many of its supporters who accuse the party of being too submissive to the True Party (DYP), its junior coalition partner.

"We have done nothing to undermine the secularist system or advance the cause of Islam for ideological purposes," Abdullah Gul, the 'shadow' minister of foreign affairs in the Refah Party, told the *Weekly* this week.

"We have refused to move on certain policy objectives so as not to antagonise anyone. This was done at the cost of alienating our grassroots who expected much more active policies from us and today we see all we did was disregarded," Gul added. Mil*itary officials, however, claim that while on the sur*face Refah seemed 'to do nothing,' it was actually following a policy of "encroachment" of the state system and that it had expanded its presence in government departments and municipalities.

While some observers believe that the MGK recommendations amounted to "a military coup threat," Erbakan quashed any rumours of an impending coup by the army which seized power in 1960, 1971 and 1980.

The left-wing and conservative opposition parties have themselves, unsuccessfully, been trying to oust the government. They accused the Refah Party of attempting to infiltrate the secularist state apparatus. They said intelligence reports warned that the "Muslim fanatics whose activities are directed towards the establishment of an Islamic state governed according to *Shari'a* (Islamic law)," had begun to arm themselves.

The conservative Motherland Party's acting chairman Agah Oktay Guner told the *Weekly* that the government should resign immediately.

And Deniz Baykal, leader of the left-wing CHP *party, said the Islamist-led government should stop* its tampering with the constitution and the principal institutions of the republic. "Failing this, it has either to resign or be brought down in parliament," he said.

Refah officials are concerned that the latest round of friction in Turkey may further alienate their supporters and push them into radicalism. But the military's fear of the Islamists coming out of fresh elections with a greater majority would force the military to back down, said Gul.

"When it comes to giving an account to the people, the soldiers' attitude will change," he said.

Any attempt of a military intervention would also further isolate Turkey and alienate it from the rest of the European countries, observers believe. It would, according to a US State Department spokesman, "push the country into a dark period".

One US official told the *Turkish Probe* magazine that a coup would mean further antagonism directed against Turkey by Congress which would block all arms sales and deliveries to Turkey.

SPLA assert Sudan's unity

A n SPLA delegation arrived in Cairo with a message to the Arab world: "We are not a threat to Sudanese unity". **Mohamed Khaled** reports

A high level delegation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is currently visiting Cairo. The purpose of the visit, according to Deng Alore, the head of the delegation and senior aide of the SPLM's leader, is to brief the Egyptian government on the events that have taken place since January in southern and eastern Sudan. "We also want to reassure the Egyptians about the fighting in the southern Blue Nile region as it may result in the taking of the Damazine and Rusairis dams. [An Egyptian concern because the Nile waters are shared between the two countries.] We shall not physically damage the dams because we need them when we take over the government and we do not want to cause *an environmental damage that will hurt not only Sudan, but Egypt* also," Alore told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

In an interview with the *Weekly*, Samson Kwaje, SPLM secretary for organisation and the spokesman of the movement, maintained that the objectives of the movement regarding the unity of Sudan have not changed. "The main struggle is for a united, democratic, secular and just Sudan for all Sudanese, in the south and the north," said Kwaje.

Ahmed Hamroush, an Egyptian writer and president of the Egyptian Committee of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation, concurred. "The SPLM is not a threat to Sudan's unity. I believe it is a unionist movement. In my judgment, the real threat is the continuation of the ongoing war and the reluctance of the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict." Hamroush added that the Charter of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which was signed by the SPLM and the northern opposition forces, is the only option for realising true unity between the people in southern and northern Sudan, an end to the war and the establishment of a democratic regime. "It is the only way to avert the danger of a shattered Sudan," said Hamroush.

Helmi Shaarawi, an Egyptian expert on Arab and African affairs and director of the Cairo-based Arab Research Centre, commented on the reasons behind the allegations of the movement's separatism. "There is always a suspicion of liberation movements being separatists and the SPLM is no exception. The sequence of events since the establishment of the movement proves that it is a unionist movement. The difficulties facing the realisation of complete unity have always been created by the ruling elite in the north. The most recent evidence is that John Garang is currently taking the responsibility of the presidency of the Joint Military Command of the NDA. This is clear evidence of his unionist attitudes."

In the face of allegations of separatist tendencies, Kwaje said *that Garang has repeatedly affirmed that the real interests of the* people of southern Sudan is in the unity of the country, provided there is justice for all in both the south and the north.

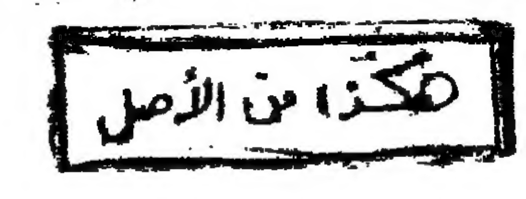
Inevitably, this qualification has resulted in Arab reservations towards the movement. Shaarawi believes that in Egypt and the Arab world, there are unnecessary fears of African domination at the expense of Arabism. Kwaje put part of the responsibility on the ruling National Islamic Front whose propaganda portrays the SPLM as fighting Arabism and Islam in Sudan and characterises it as a separatist movement. "It is actually the present [NIF-controlled] government that turned the war into a religious one by calling for *Jihad*." said Kwaje.

Kwaje added that a similar confusion exists on the African side. Some African countries believe that the war is racial, pitting Arabs against Africans, or religious, with Islam fighting Christianity. However, "there are southern and northern Muslims who are members of the SPLM. Some members of the SPLM are also of Arab descent. This defeats the argument that this war is racial or religious," argued Kwaje. He added that "it is the bankrupt regime that has been defeated by the forces of democracy in the south and the north. It must, therefore, appeal to concepts that everybody cherishes, like religion, so as to provoke the feelings of the population in the Muslim world."

Kwaje *explained that the SPLM* is "appealing to the international community, including the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa, that this war is neither religious nor racial. It is a struggle for justice. We have agreed with members of the NDA, particularly the northern opposition, to tell the Arab world the same." Hamroush emphasised the necessity for the SPLM and the NDA to initiate a multi-channel dialogue to bring about an understanding and mobilise Arabs support.

Arab reservations have been combined with claims of the SPLM's relations with Israel. According to Kwaje, "It is true that the movement of Anya Nya that preceded the SPLM has at*tempted* to solicit support from Israel. They got a little in the form of sub-automatic machine guns and used this to prove to the then-Sudanese government that they were helped by Israel. Nowadays, however, the simple fact that Israel is making peace with the Arabs prevents any sentimental appeal for help from the SPLM as they could have done in the '60s. Additionally, at the moment, we have senior Muslim members in the movement, including commanders who would never tolerate cooperation with Israel. Therefore, there are no overt or covert dealings between the SPLM and Israel."

According *to SPLM leaders*, Egypt is the bridge through which the they can gain Arab understanding and support. This can only be achieved through frequent contact. Last week, the press mentioned a possible visit to Cairo by SPLM leader, John Garang. Alore, denying that such a visit was mentioned in discussions with Egyptian officials, believed, nevertheless, that it would be important for it to take place at a more appropriate time. Garang, he said, could not in any case leave the site of military operation during the dry season, which lasts until June, since this is the most propitious time for battle. "The time will come for a visit and it will be well coordinated by *the two sides*. The main purpose is to address the Arabs through Egypt since Egypt is the starting point for such a move." said Alore.



Squeezing Abu Mazen's foot into Eitan's shoe

Graham Usher interviews Yossi Beilin, contender to the leadership of the Israeli Labour Party and architect of the Oslo, and various other, accords



Yossi Beilin was a cabinet minister in Israel's last Labour government. In December 1992, he initiated the "secret channel" with the PLO which eventually led to the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians. In October 1995, he reached a series of "understandings" with PLO executive committee member Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) laying out the "red lines" that would govern any final Israel-Palestinian settlement. In January 1997, he signed a "National Accord" with Likud's Knesset (parliament) group leader, Michael Eitan, and six Labour and Likud members of the Knesset outlining their common ideas on a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. Beilin is also running for the position of leader of the Labour Party when Shimon Peres resigns later this year.

In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, *Beilin talks about the understandings he reached with Abu Mazen as well as the accord he signed with Eitan. He also gives his views on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the Middle East peace process. Finally, he describes those sectors of Israeli society which he feels are most likely to be attracted by his policies.*

Could you summarise the understandings you reached with Abu Mazen?

For Israel, the main issue is security. This means that any future Palestinian state must be demilitarised; that the Israeli army will stay on the Jordan River; that there will be no return to the 1967 borders; that the Palestinian refugees from 1948 will not be permitted into sovereign Israel; that Jerusalem will not be re-divided; and that the Jewish settlements will not be uprooted.

I don't want to speak on behalf of the Palestinians. But, according to the "deniable understandings" reached between Abu Mazen and myself, it was understood that there will be a Palestinian state. It will include all of Gaza and most of the West Bank, with a safe passage between the two. It is also understood that, generally speaking, the Palestinian area would not be compromised and would not be cut in two.

The Palestinian capital will be Al-Quds, which will be located outside the united Jerusalem of today but within the suburbs of Jerusalem. It will be within an area that is part of Al-Quds according to the Palestinians' geographical definition. The Temple Mount (site of Al-Aqsa Mosque) will be extraterritorial to Israel, which means the Palestinians will be the dominant power in the place and will determine all norms there.

The Palestinians in Jerusalem will become citizens of a Palestinian state rather than citizens of Jordan, as is the case today. They will have a borough in Jerusalem that is municipally autonomous. The issue of the final status of East Jerusalem will be deferred to a later stage.

On these bases, the Palestinians will recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, while we would recognise Al-Quds as their capital. The 1948 refugees would not be permitted into Israel, but there would be no restrictions on their integration into the Palestinian state.

Most of the Jewish settlements would come under the sovereignty of the Palestinian state. Those settlers who wish to return to Israel would be compensated. Those who choose to stay would live under Palestinian sovereignty and obey Palestinian laws, with certain security arrangements. Most of the Jewish settlers, i.e. those who live in the areas of Gush Ezion, the Jerusalem area and Ariel, would become part of Israel. These annexed areas comprise less than 10 per cent of the West Bank. In return, a small part of the northern Negev would be annexed to the Gaza Strip.

Would the Palestinians be expected to recognise, as the capital of Israel, those parts of Jerusalem that were annexed to Israel after the 1967 war?

According to the understandings, these parts would be disputed areas. The Palestinians would recognise West Jerusalem as our capital. We would recognise Al-Quds as theirs. Somewhere in the middle is East Jerusalem, whose status would prevail under the current arrangements. That is, it would be an area over which Israel claims its sovereignty, but which the Palestinians do not accept. There would be a joint committee set up to decide on its future.

So it is a maintenance of the status quo but with an agreement to change this status quo in the future. What would be the fate of the 1948 refugees who do not want to live in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza?

In the understandings, there is a chapter referring to the refugees' rehabilitation i.e. the compensation they would receive under the umbrella of a new international organisation that would replace UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency).

Does the Likud government's decision to build the Har Homa settlement contradict your understandings with Abu Mazen or is it consistent with them?

I don't see where they meet. The understandings are about a permanent solution, not the meantime. We didn't refer to the meantime.

In reference to Har Homa, I would say to the Israeli government, "OK, you can build, but in the future it might be a disputed area." I would have preferred any building to have taken place in the context of the final solution, when both sides know where they stand. But one cannot say Har Homa is against Oslo or against my understandings with Abu Mazen. One could say it is against the spirit of Oslo, because it has to do with Jerusalem and Jerusalem is on the agenda of the final status negotiations. But you cannot refer to a specific sentence in the Oslo Accords or anywhere else which says that Israel cannot build Har Homa.

To what extent did your understandings with Abu Mazen have the approval of prime ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres?

They did not know about them. When the understandings became public, Rabin was dead and Peres wasn't too happy about them.

Which understandings was Shimon Peres unhappy about?

I don't know. I never discussed them with Shimon Peres.

Some Israeli commentators say that with the National Accord between yourself and Eitan you "were pulled rightwards" from the understandings you reached with Abu Mazen...

The signed accord with Michael Eitan is much vaguer than the unsigned understandings with Abu Mazen. For example, in the Beilin-Eitan accord we do not say that the Temple Mount will be extraterritorial to Israel. It says there will be "special arrangements" for the holy places in Jerusalem. It is left deliberately vague.

One commentator described the understandings with Abu Mazen as the foot and the accord with Eitan as the shoe. I subscribe to this image.

But does the shoe fit the foot?

Yes. It is not always a comfortable fit. It pinches here and there, but eventually they fit. My role in both was to ensure that there was no contradiction between them.

This was achieved except for two points. The Likud members of parliament were against a Palestinian state but for an extended Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza. They also demanded Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley. These positions contradict the understandings with Abu Mazen. Our version is that there will be a Palestinian state and that Israel will not have sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.

What was the understanding reached with Abu Mazen over the Jordan Valley?

The Jordan Valley won't be under Israeli sovereignty. The settlements, like everywhere else in the West Bank, would be permitted to remain there and the Israeli army would be on the Jordan River.

Indefinitely?

We agreed that 10 years after a permanent settlement is reached certain issues would be reviewed. The Israeli army's presence on the Jordan River is one of these issues.

You advocate Israel's unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon. Is this withdrawal a fulfilment of UN Resolution 425?

I believe Israel should fulfil this resolution. But I think we should also reach some informal understandings. I believe if we condition withdrawal on a peace agreement with Lebanon or Syria or both, we may be in south Lebanon for a long time. And I don't want to be there. I don't want to be a card in the hands of my enemies. I know the Syrians want us to stay in south Lebanon, it's their pleasure, it's not mine. I think it is idiotic that we are playing into Syria's hands.

The informal understandings would be for Hizbullah to be disarmed and to establish a security fence once we redeploy our forces south of the international border with Lebanon. On the basis of these understandings, I believe we should withdraw. If, then, we are still being hit by Hizbullah or whoever else from Lebanon, we will act according to our national interests.

With whom would you reach these informal understandings?

With all the forces who play a role in south Lebanon.

Could you be more specific?

No. I don't want to limit my scope. Had I been Israel's prime minister, I would have tried to speak to all forces. I don't want to play the game of speaking to one but not the other, of boycotting this rather than that militia. I don't want to boycott anyone. All those willing to talk to me informally about Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon would be welcome.

I don't think Hizbullah wants us to remain in south Lebanon. I think there are diverging interests between Syria and Hizbullah.

I think the only common denominator is their hatred towards us, especially as long as we are in south Lebanon. I cannot be sure that once we leave the area this hatred will stop or that they won't try to act against us. But I am sure we can defend our land from within Israel rather than from without. I don't see any reason to remain in south Lebanon indefinitely.

If we could achieve withdrawal in the context of peace talks with Syria, of course I would prefer it. But I am pessimistic as to whether Assad wants peace with us.

The Syrians say they want negotiations to resume from the point they left off. This, they say, includes an understanding reached with Prime Minister Rabin that Israel would withdraw to the 4 June 1967 borders in exchange for agreements on normalisation and security. Is this a position you would accept to achieve peace with Syria?

No. I don't see how the Israeli government can be committed to anything that has not been signed. Why should Likud continue from the point we left off? The Syrians missed the boat. It had an Israeli prime minister who said that the extent of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan would be determined by the extent of the peace Syria wanted with us. Now Syria is coming to Likud and saying it wants to resume from the point we left off. How can Syria demand this?

There is a new government in Israel, with its own views about the Golan Heights. I am not crazy about these views. But Likud is the legitimate government of Israel. If it wants to start talks with Syria from a new basis, it is permitted to do so.

I am anyway against any withdrawal to the 4 June lines. There is no justification for this Syrian demand. The only line is the international border. That was the line we negotiated with the Egyptians and that will be the line we negotiate on with Lebanon and Syria. There is no better line than the international border. If it is illegal to conquer territory by force, then why is it permitted for Syria?

The 4 June line is not the international border. Again, were I Israel's prime minister, I would say to Syria, "Please, let us end this game. You and I know the only border is the international one. You will have the Golan Heights, so let us see what we can agree regarding de-militarisation, security arrangements, normalisation, diplomatic relations. In other words, let us make peace."

To reverse this, to start with these issues before addressing the question of borders is a mistake. But since Assad did not come when Rabin suggested everything, I doubt he will come when nothing is being suggested.

Are you saying Syria is not interested in regaining the Golan Heights?

I don't know. I am not a commentator. I've never met Assad. I've never met any of his people. I only understand what I see. And what I see is that when we were in power, we were ready to strike a deal, but Assad was not there.

If you were prime minister, would you be prepared to withdraw to the international border in exchange for a peace treaty with Syria?

Yes. Undoubtedly.

You have outlined your policies. Who are your constituents?

I don't think we have a "centre" in Israeli politics. We have right and left. It is true there are some people who are frustrated by Likud but who vote Likud every four years. But in trying to woo these voters by moving to the centre you alienate your true supporters who will then not turn out to vote on election day. This is what happened to us in the last elections.

My strategy is to ensure that my camp supports my candidature for leadership of the Labour Party. But I believe I can also attract votes from the religious people, from the right and from settlers who understand that my plan to annex the small part of the West Bank where most of them live is much better than Likud's position of never recognising a Palestinian state.

The reason is simple: if you are not prepared to accept Palestinian sovereignty over most of the territories, you will never have Israeli sovereignty over a small part of them. What you have is the status quo of the last 30 years — Israelis in the territories living in no man's land.

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From bunker to market

A newborn government alliance in Albania will, it is hoped, prompt the opposition to lay down its arms, writes **Jooneed Khan**

For decades, Enver Hoxha, a former teacher and anti-Nazi fighter, managed his communist paradise by building bunkers while Albanians remained the poorest of Europeans. Large families were packed in cheap apartments with little or no services, few jobs and poor pay, into the 1990s.

Enter heart surgeon Sali Berisha and his Democratic Party, with feverish promises of a capitalist paradise. After five years of building pyramids in the sky, Albanians are even poorer, their savings of a lifetime of deprivation sucked away by the magic of the market. Promises of 30 to 40 per cent interest per month were too good to be true and the investment schemes collapsed once money stopped flowing into them.

Hardest hit by the scam, Albanians in the south of the country are now up in arms, demanding Berisha's resignation, fresh elections, a full inquiry into the pyramid schemes and compensation for the millions of dollars lost by hundreds of thousands of big and small savers.

The United Nations Development Project (UNDP) reported that 80 per cent of Albanians lived below their own country's poverty line until 1995. According to the *Albanian Observer*, an economic publication, 80 per cent of Albanians are now living under the European poverty line of $143 a month for a family of four.

Indeed, the *Albanian Observer* writes that 700,000 Albanians live on government handouts of $31 a month; unemployment was at 13 per cent last year and price hikes and lower pensions have halved the purchasing power of some 161,000 rural pensioners, who receive $10 a month — as compared to $38 a month for urban pensioners.

The country of 28,000 sq km and 3.4 million inhabitants is again divided into North and South. The army and police apparatus is refusing to shoot at the rebels, and European and American diplomacy is working overtime to contain and defuse the crisis which threatens to engulf the Balkans only one year after Serb guns in Bosnia-Herzegovina were silenced by the US at Dayton.

At stake are also oil and gas contracts, infrastructure projects and Albania's reserve of cheap labour as an attraction for European investments.

The ironies go further. Enver Hoxha was notorious for turning Albania, the Land of the Eagle, into a kind of hermit kingdom, isolating it from the outside world and cultivating an autarchic system fed by aid from its communist allies.

Today, when globalisation is all the rage and open borders a dogma of sorts, Albania is being isolated by its neighbours, namely Italy, Greece and Macedonia, for fear of an onrush of refugees fleeing war and poverty.

The biggest irony of all is how the "Big Powers" seem to have been caught flat-footed by the crisis: for five years, the US and Europe looked to Sali Berisha as the Great Hope of the West in the war against the Serbs. They used Albania as a base for flights over Serbia and Bosnia, counted on Berisha to contain Albanian nationalist militancy over Kosovo gangs and various Italian Mafia, and helped Serbia and Montenegro bust UN sanctions during the Bosnian war by selling oil to them, wrote the English newspaper *The Independent* recently, quoting Western intelligence sources.

The British paper went so far as to accuse Berisha of running a "one-party gangster state" and of financing his Democratic Party by gun-running and drug-trafficking. It called the May 1996 parliamentary elections "too dirty", with the Democratic Party winning 122 of the 140 seats.

So it was a major policy shift last week when the US State Department "regretted" that Berisha got himself re-elected president by parliament two days after placing Albania under a state of emergency, expressed its "concern that the state of emergency is being used to stifle legitimate dissent" and called for "a broad-based government that has the support of the people" and which will lead to "early, free and fair parliamentary elections".

The resignation of the government led by Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi and air raids by Mig-15s having failed to calm the southern rebels, dubbed "terrorist gangs" by the state media, Berisha met with the opposition Forum for Democracy, a 10-party coalition dominated by the socialists (former communists). He also called a 48-hour unilateral cease-fire, coupled with an offer of amnesty for rebels who would turn in their weapons, mostly taken from police stations and army bases.

But Berisha rejected two key opposition demands — that he form a coalition government with the socialists and that he call new elections soon.

The rebels, in turn, refused his amnesty offer and by week's end, they had captured the key government stronghold of Gjirokaster, routing army reinforcements sent by helicopter and capturing the commander, Gen Ali Kontrakou, and his aide.

As the ceasefire expired Sunday morning, the rebels were busy organising resistance leadership in the towns of Vlora, Memaliaj, Tepelena, Himare, Delvine, Gjirokaster and Saranda. They had taken advantage of the lull in fighting to arm and reinforce themselves. Meanwhile, civilians were fleeing, mostly ethnic Greek Albanians entering Greece across the southern border.

Berisha didn't have much choice: either he dug in for the long haul behind the army, with the certain prospect of a civil war pitting his northern Gheg clans against the southern Tosks, and with the real danger of the conflict spilling over into the Albanian communities of neighbouring Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia, or he defused the crisis by giving in to the key opposition demands.

He sensibly chose the latter course. "The army will never intervene against the people; the army does not exist anymore", declared former Defence Minister Perikli Teta. Indeed, most of the rebel committees in the south are made up of former army officers who switched sides, turning over to the people huge quantities of Chinese-made arms and ammunition bought under Enver Hoxha, who was himself a southerner.

Then there was the pressure of Western diplomacy. With the US looming in the background, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) sent a delegation headed by former Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitzky and the EU delegated Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo and EC vice-president Rene van der Linden. Rome and Athens were in permanent phone contact with Tirana, and Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini was constantly shuttling back and forth over the Adriatic.

"Mr Berisha has made important concessions because he wants to save his country", said a Western diplomat in Tirana after the president announced he was backing off in a televised address to the nation Sunday morning.

"I had difficulty accepting a coalition with the socialists because it goes against my party's programme, but I resign myself to it for the higher interests of the nation", said Berisha, looking tired and shaken.

He coupled his acceptance of a government of "national reconciliation" and new parliamentary elections before June with an offer of a general amnesty for all rebels, civilian and military. He called on the southern rebels to put an end to the violence, in which some 30 people have died over a period of one week, and to surrender their arms by the end of this week.

Pendeli Majko, secretary-general of the Socialist Party, said the state of emergency would be lifted by Saturday. With Italy as guarantor of the accord, Lamberto Dini flew into Tirana Sunday evening to see to its implementation. He called the accord "a big step towards the pacification of Albania", but said the southern rebels "have no legitimacy" and that they had "no other choice but to lay down their weapons".

At the time of writing, the rebels, who have been calling for Berisha's resignation, were showing great caution. Xhevat Kociu, a former army officer leading the rebellion in Saranda, said Berisha's concessions were "a half-step", adding he was waiting to see that the Albanian president "honours his pledge" or else his men would not lay down their arms.

Some opposition leaders who had fled to the Greek island of Corfu, only 20 km away, were returning to Saranda Sunday evening to join the insurrection. Among them was Ridvan Peshpekepia, leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA) and a former Berisha ally in the struggle against communism. Two other opposition leaders, one of the DA, the other of the Socialist Party, were also preparing to leave Corfu for Saranda.

The situation remained tense. Ibrahim Rugova, self-declared "President of the Republic of Kosovo", had asked for a coalition government and fresh elections in Albania. But the Serbian province, where 90 per cent of the 2.1 million inhabitants are Albanian, remains a powder keg: 99 per cent of voters opted for independence in a 1991 referendum in which 87 per cent of the electorate participated. And Montenegro students are boycotting classes to protest teaching of Albanian for the 50,000 Albanians of the Yugoslav state, which has a total population of 620,000. In Macedonia, Albanians comprise between 20 and 40 per cent of the population of 2 million.

Serbia accuses Albania of harbouring bases of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which has carried out violent attacks on Albanian collaborators and Serbian officials. Kosovo Albanians, on the other hand, have documented widespread human rights violations at the hands of the Serbian authorities. And northern Albania is home to the extreme-right Shkoder United League, whose dreams of a Greater Albania going back to Illyrian times are a major destabilising factor in the Balkan equation.



IN NEW DELHI, members of an Indian women's organisation form a human chain on International Women's Day, 8 March. The activists were dramatising their demand for a 30 per cent representation of women in parliament. Worldwide, 8 March has become a day for celebrating as well as highlighting women's ongoing struggles to attain equal economic, political and social rights with men. (*photo: Reuters*)

Hunger missiles over Cuba

While the US tries to lure the Cuban army with cash and power carrots, millions of Cubans are suffering from the devastating effects of a 35-year-old embargo, writes **Faiza Rady**

"I believe very few Americans realise what our country is trying to do down there — starve people into submission and deprive children and old people of medicine."
Dr Benjamin Spock

Tighter US trade embargo restrictions on Cuba since 1992 have had "devastating effects" on the health of Cubans, according to a study released last week by the prominent American Association of World Health (AAWH), which serves as the US committee for the World Health Organisation. Published a year after the passage of the Helms-Burton bill into law in March 1996, the report reveals how relentless tightening of the screws on the 35-year-old embargo against the tiny Caribbean island has in recent years affected the lives of millions of its people.

Regarded by many analysts as a veritable political manifesto, Helms-Burton — in US government parlance: the "Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act" — codifies the American embargo against Cuba unless and until democratic elections are held and the country moves towards democracy under the aegis of the "free market based on the right and enjoyment of private property". This peculiarly American version of democracy, however, may not include the Cuban leader Fidel Castro or, for that matter, his brother Raúl, states section (205 a) of the extensive and verbose document — which, critics say, distorts any semblance of free trade.

"We must vote to throttle Fidel Castro," chirped ultra-conservative Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, before legislators voted the bill into law. "Without foreign currency from the outside, Mr. Castro's days will be numbered," he concluded. The UN General Assembly interpreted the tightening blockade in different terms. "The US embargo of Cuba causes shortages of food, medicine and other important supplies for 11 million people. The embargo is an immoral policy that uses hunger and disease as political weapons," reads the 1995 UN Resolution against the Blockade.

Buried under a barrage of "free-market" new speak, Helms-Burton is, in fact, criticised for establishing the most exacerbated forms of prohibitive market controls. A case in point: in addition to banning US companies from directly trading with Cuba, the law prohibits such companies from buying Cuban products through a third party. In an attempt to further restrict Cuban trade, Burton- Helms also allows American individuals and companies to sue any foreign company and its shareholders for the use of confiscated state property originally belonging to the Cuban American Contra elite that gravitated around the former Baptista dictatorship.

To circumvent a flood of potentially damaging lawsuits, some established foreign companies have resorted to operating undercover by camouflaging their labels and erasing brand names from their products. Others try to escape the Contras' recently legalised wrath by moving their headquarters to safe territory. "Many foreign industrialists are now renting suites in the Cohiba Hotel; having been recently built it cannot be suspected of ever having been confiscated," reports Cuba expert Janette Habel.

But some companies are already fighting a deluge of lawsuits based on Helms-Burton. Pernod-Ricard, the international distributor of the Cuban Rum *Havana Club*, is currently being sued by the Bacardi Group, the worldwide foremost producer of alcoholic beverages. "We are being sued by everybody, this is a real commercial war," deplored Noël Adrian, the general manager of Pernod-Ricard in Havana.

"Many foreign firms planning to invest in Cuba keep their plans secret, because once their plans are known they are subjected to implacable persecution. We have statistics showing that eight out of 10 business ventures are interrupted," explained Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina. Concerned that the US trade war may set a precedent for Washington to coerce other Latin and South American countries into submission, the South American regional organisation Rio Group strongly denounced the law. In a statement released in Brasilia last March, the Rio Group said that Helms-Burton "ignores the fundamental principles of respect for sovereign states", adding that the law's implementation "means extraterritorial application of domestic law, which is in conflict with international law."

Title IV of the law even prohibits the shareholders and managers of foreign companies operating in Cuba from entering American territory. This prohibition was recently applied when some upper echelon managers of the Canadian transnational Sherrit International and the Mexican *Grupo Domos* were denied US visas — in violation of the North American Free Trade Agreement between the US, Canada and Mexico, which stipulates the free movement of capital and investors across national borders.

To add fuel to the fire and finally remove the recalcitrant Castro from power, US President Bill Clinton has most recently tried his hand at bribing the Cuban military — the Revolutionary Armed Forces (RAF) — into initiating a coup against the Cuban leader. At the end of January, Clinton signed a 20-page document characteristically entitled "Support for a democratic transition in Cuba", pledging up to $8 billion for the island's "reconstruction" after the projected takeover. In addition to the powerful cash enticement, the document attempts to lure the Cuban brass with various attractive propositions such as joining the Inter-American Council of Defense and benefiting from cooperation agreements with the armed forces of other countries, like the US.

Despite the enticing package deal some analysts believe that Clinton's proposal will fall on deaf ears. "The RAF benefits from a nationalist culture which is incompatible with Washington's opportunistic proposals," said Damián Fernández, professor of international relations at the International University of Florida. According to Fernández, the RAF's moral code would not allow them to conspire against the Cuban Revolution, an integral part of their history.

The US embargo's stranglehold has caused "unnecessary suffering and deaths," said Peter Bourne, AAWH chairman. The embargo has "had a devastating impact on the health of ordinary Cubans, particularly women, children, the elderly and people with chronic diseases," reported the association. Currently, the average Cuban has only access to two-thirds of the 1,297 types of medicine available in 1991, because the embargo was tightened to include a ban on American subsidiary trade in 1992.

This version of the blockade, also known as the "Toricelli Law", prohibits foreign carriers heading for Cuba to cross US waterways. "Toricelli" was condemned in the UN General Assembly for affecting "other nations' sovereignty... and freedoms of trade and navigation". Moreover, Cubans are also deprived of any drug internationally patented by US manufacturers because of patent restriction laws which banned exports to the island in 1980.

For the Cuban people the embargo's results have been especially disastrous since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the island's main trading partner and financial donor. Since 1990, the government was forced to cut down on 75 per cent of its imports and reduce food subsidies by 60 per cent. Infant formula and powdered milk imports now only partially cover children's needs up to the age of seven, and about half of the six to 12-year olds are anaemic. Cuban health personnel report an increase in some infectious diseases, in iron-deficiency anaemia among pregnant women and a rise in the incidence of low-birth-weight babies, changes that the Cuban Ministry of Health attributes to problems in food supply imports. Moreover, physicians believe that the neuropathy epidemic which appeared in late 1991 was partly caused by nutritional deficiencies.

The American State Department hastily refuted the study, claiming that the embargo has not caused any shortages of medicine because Cuba was "free" to buy medication from Asian and European countries. Reality, however, looks somewhat different. While the State Department casually dismissed the problem by suggesting that Cuba find an alternative exporter of pharmaceuticals, it conveniently omitted to mention the considerable cost of switching markets — especially for a besieged cash-strapped economy.

In effect, after Cuba was forced to buy its pharmaceuticals from Europe, the price of medication increased between 30 per cent and 40 per cent due to added shipping costs. Over the years, the overall increment in transport costs alone were valued at $2,510 million.

The AAWH report points out that Cuba's water supply system was designed and built with American technology, but since the notorious embargo, the country has been unable to buy spare parts for the chlorinating system that treats 72 per cent of the country's drinking water. The study found that the relative scarcity of clean water has caused an increase in potentially lethal infections. In 1995, diseases related to the consumption of contaminated water affected 349 patients, resulting in 60 deaths.

Overall, deaths caused by water-carried diseases have doubled since 1989. Denied essential US-made spare parts and lacking the means to reconvert the system, the Cuban government has been unable to provide many Cubans with sufficient potable water — a basic human right which the embargo denies the Cuban people.

On Sunday in Havana, Fidel Castro cried out: "Inside the country and outside, we have to keep on working, knowing that we have against us the most powerful enemy in the world."

Bibi plays the market card

In the wake of Yasser Arafat's successful visit to Moscow, Israel attempts to boost its position in Russia by emphasising economic and cultural ties between the two nations, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil**

Addressing a buoyant crowd of Russian Jews in Moscow on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu reiterated his pledge to keep Jerusalem under Israeli occupation. "I hope... that we will be able to bless you in unified Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, which forever will remain united and under Israel's sovereignty," Netanyahu said amidst jubilant cheering and applause.

The Israeli Prime Minister, who spoke in Hebrew to a packed hall at Moscow's main Choral Synagogue, otherwise avoided Middle Eastern politics, focusing instead on Jewish history. He praised Russia's liberal changes which, he contended, allowed Jewish religion and culture to flourish in the nation. "We have excellent relations with Russia and I hope they will improve in the economic, cultural and political fields," he said.

Netanyahu's declarations, which came in the wake of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's visit to Russia last month, are sure to further alienate the Palestinian leadership.

The former Soviet Union had historically been a strong supporter of the Palestinians' right to self-determination, helping balance Washington's overtly pro-Israel stand. Although Moscow's political support of the Palestinians has continued, as evidenced by Yeltsin's recent call on Israel to lift its blockade on Palestinian territory, Netanyahu is now pushing for the country to shift its leanings in the Middle East by capitalising on bilateral trade and investment interests.

In this context, it is telling that Netanyahu arrived in Moscow with a delegation of approximately 20 prominent Israeli businessmen ready to boost the current annual $500 million trade figure between the two countries. "Israel is prepared to cooperate with Russia economically. We have a great future together," the Prime Minister told reporters at the elegant Metropol Hotel, where he was the dinner guest of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov on Monday.

Netanyahu also played the ethnic and cultural identity card by referring to Israel's Russian immigrant community. "We have a million people who speak Russian; that is the largest concentration outside the former Soviet Union," he said, adding that Israel had the highest concentration of scientists per capita worldwide, including many Russians who "could form a bridge to greater cooperation." Netanyahu also mentioned Israeli cabinet ministers of Russian origin, such as Trade Minister Sharansky, a former refusenik and veteran political prisoner who was turned over to the West as part of a 1986 prisoner swap. Sharansky recently visited Russia to lay the groundwork for Netanyahu's visit.

Lured by lucrative investment prospects, the Russian side seemed to warm up to Netanyahu's overtures. "Our countries and their leaders have finished a period of biased attitudes and have energetically moved toward each other," responded Yeltsin, assuring Netanyahu that this new era included "political, economic and trade relations." Expanded trade relations would include Israel's purchase of natural gas — a multi-billion dollar deal prepared by Israeli Chief of Staff Avigdor Lieberman during a secret meeting in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova with Russian financier Vladimir Gujansky. More importantly, an ambitious plan to build a gas pipeline through Turkey is in the making and would do much to consolidate the two countries' economic ties.

On the political front, Netanyahu hopes to dissuade Russia from selling nuclear know-how to Iran, a potential adversary in the Middle East. Israel has repeatedly complained about Russian sales of nuclear technology to Iran that could help the Islamic Republic develop nuclear weapons, thereby challenging Israel's nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. Moscow, however, is not ready to give up this highly profitable trade with Iran and insists that the technology is purely for civilian use. Israel is also pushing hard to limit Russian arms sales to Syria.

Most political observers agree, however, that Moscow will not meet Netanyahu's demands on that front, either. While the expansion of bilateral trade relations may look attractive to Yeltsin, this will not be achieved at the expense of the wider Middle Eastern market.

Direct ties

A CHECHEN delegation arrived in Egypt this week for a three-day visit on the invitation of the Egyptian Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) and the country's Islamic leaders, reports **Abdel-Malek Khalil**.

While on a visit to Egypt on Monday, the Chechen Mufti Ahmed Abdel-Hamid Qadir held lengthy discussions with Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq, Egyptian Minister of *Al-Awqaf*, Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi and the Mufti of the Republic, Nasr Farid Wassel. In the course of their discussions, they looked into means of boosting cooperation between Egypt and Chechnya in educational and cultural affairs.

The Chechen Mufti praised Egypt's consistent backing of the Chechen people's national aspirations and right to self-determination. Over the last two years, Egypt was at the forefront of Arab and Islamic countries calling for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region during the war in Chechnya.

The visit of the Chechen delegation came fast on the heels of another, no less significant visit a week earlier, by a high-powered delegation from the Republic of Tatarstan, headed by President Mentimir Chaemiev, who held talks with President Hosni Mubarak and Youssef Wali, Egypt's deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture. A source close to the Tatarstan government revealed that last week's negotiations will result in increased arms sales and technology exchanges.

Establishing independent trade relations between the two countries represents an important breakthrough because this was the first time that Tatarstan and Egypt separately discussed bilateral relations — without being under the auspices of the Russian government. Such a step may also pave the way for other Russian republics to follow suit and break away from Moscow's economic and political dictates by setting up their own national foreign policy agendas.

Direct relations between Egypt and members of the Russian federation are unlikely, however, to affect its close ties with Moscow. Officially, Russia allows the republics a certain degree of autonomy in foreign affairs, short of letting them establish an independent diplomacy.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

173 Benevolent societies began sprouting all over Egypt in the 1870s. Charity establishments also included so-called 'economy kitchens' that offered free meals to the poor. In this instalment of his *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** traces the history of charity and other societies with similar aims



"Championing chastity", the headline of *Al-Ahram*'s editorial of 1 April 1903, heralded the founding of a benevolent society of this name by a group of "upstanding citizens" in order "to assist poor women to get married". This development, the article continues, "is particularly welcome in a large Oriental city such as Cairo, home to all religious sects and denominations and a crossroads for all nations. This alone is sufficient to demonstrate its value as a vivid model for all to emulate." To be certain, the author maintained, charitable institutions of this sort, wherever they exist, contribute greatly to alleviating the pain and wretchedness of poverty. After all, "poverty is not a disgrace, just as wealth is not a virtue. All men are brothers in this world. The noblest are those who are the most charitable, most benevolent and most compassionate."

If there is anything to glean at all from this announcement, it is that benevolent societies had become so widespread and diversified that some were dedicated to finding spouses for poor women "in defence of virtue." Civic institutions of this nature had been making inroads into Egyptian society since the end of the reign of the Khedive Ismail, through the remainder of the 19th century under British occupation, reaching their peak at the beginning of the 20th century.

Numerous social and political phenomena contributed to this trend. To a considerable extent, it was due to the evolution of a class of large and mid-level agrarian landowners who formed the backbone of charitable activity in Egyptian society. The benevolent works they instituted were inspired by the ancient legacy of *awqaf* (religious endowment) foundations. Bequeathed to Egyptian society since the Middle Ages, the *waqf* foundations increasingly came to constitute the bedrock of public services in education, housing, health care and other areas of humanitarian assistance, as the central government relinquished its function in these domains. It was a tradition that could not easily be cast aside, given the religious motivation behind it. Certainly too they were also motivated by the aura of prestige such works conferred upon them.

Alongside this class, the latter quarter of the 19th century saw the rapid rise of the *effendi* or government functionary class. Members of this class evinced a strong willingness to engage in charitable activities, particularly in the major urban centres of Cairo, Alexandria and the capital cities of the provinces. If they did not have the financial facilities of the major landed classes, they had the organisational skills, diligence and dedication, particularly in the field of education. The shrinking role of the government, which had been providing this service to the public since Mohamed Ali founded the modern state, created a demand for individuals to take the initiative to fill the gap thus generated. The gradual acceptance and, by the end of the reign of Ismail, the generally universal conviction that secular education held the key to social and economic advancement furthered the incentive in this domain.

The rise in foreign missionary activity in the fields of education and health was also a contributing factor to the development of local charitable efforts. French, American and Italian missionaries, which enjoyed the privileges conferred upon foreign communities by the capitulation system, were particularly active and there can be no doubt that their increasing presence in important domains of public life provoked considerable consternation among Muslims and Copts alike. Muslims naturally feared that the missionaries' ultimate objective was to convert them to Christianity. In a sense, the Copts had more cause for concern, having observed that the restraint exercised by the foreign missionaries with regard to the Muslims for fear of popular reaction did not apply to them and that foreign missionaries were seeking to convert Orthodox Copts to the Protestant or Catholic creeds. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the Coptic Tawfiq Society was established, its founders claimed as one of its justifications the need to counteract the foreign denominational schools that were attempting to lure Copts away from their faith.

The foreign presence in Egypt in itself provided an incentive to Egyptians to enter the field of community work. The endeavours of foreign communities, whether those of Syrian or European origin, to build schools, hospitals and orphanages for their members and to found charitable societies that not infrequently brought them together with native Egyptians undoubtedly contributed to the spread of such manifestations of philanthropy among the various sectors of Egyptian society. Whatever the causes for the flourishing of charitable work at the outset of this century, it was a subject that garnered the coverage and backing of the nation's newspapers, notably *Al-Ahram*.

In its 13 January 1904 edition, the newspaper featured a front-page story on "Benevolent homes and pious deeds in the Egyptian capital". Many of these activities were sponsored by the French. An "old age home" was at that time a particularly innovative notion. The home that was opened by French nuns had as its purpose "to serve the elderly who are no longer capable of earning a living. Fifty-one individuals of all nationalities are currently being housed in the shelter where they find food and a bed and where they are cared for by nuns."

Another order of French nuns founded a hospital in which, according to this article, they provided free treatment for around 4,500 patients a year, of whom more than 3,500 were Egyptians.

It is interesting to note that, next door to the hospital, the nuns opened what they called the "economy kitchen" which offered "free meals to the poor and elderly who have no family members to care for them."

Financing such endeavours naturally remained one of the primary concerns of the foreigners operating such institutions. One of the most common means to raise funds were the charity markets and auctions sponsored by the wives of the foreign consuls. Not infrequently, foreign banks and companies operating in Egypt would offer donations in their names. At the same time, many preferred to enter their contributions "anonymously".

The newspaper's keenest interest focused on the charitable societies founded by the Maronite and Greek Orthodox communities in Cairo.

Egyptians did not lag far behind the foreign communities in the founding of charitable societies. Indeed, by the end of the reign of Ismail in 1879, the first and most famous of such institutions, the Islamic Charity Society had been founded with the mission of "educating and instilling into the young the spirit of knowledge." The names of many illustrious national figures were linked to this society. Notable among them were Abdallah Nadim and Mohamed Abdu. Perhaps the following report of the general assembly meeting of this society, published in *Al-Ahram* on 20 May 1901, best serves to illustrate the status this society enjoyed and the nature of the activities it sponsored.

The first order of business of this meeting was to elect the board of directors. Standing for nomination were a host of individuals whose names reverberate in Egyptian history: Ibrahim Bek Momtaz, Alawi Bek, Saad Zaghlul and Hassan Abdel-Razeq. The board chairman was "the venerable scholar, Sheikh Mohamed Abdu, the Mufti of Egypt."

One notes from the report that the society's activities were primarily focused on education. At that time, it operated four schools, one each in Cairo, Alexandria, Assiut and Tanta, with a total student enrolment of 311. In this meeting, the society moved to employ 15 of the graduates from these schools.

Funding for the society was generally provided by private donations from prominent individuals and membership fees which amounted to LE2,155 that year. More important to the society, however, were the *waqf* foundations established for it by wealthy patrons. In the following year's report, we find that "Lady Fatma has bestowed 179 feddans of land in trust, Lady Bakhita 21 feddans, Lady Mayana has contributed 60 feddans and Ismail Bek Assem has granted us 1,533 feddans of land in trust."

The Islamic Charity Society rivalled its foreign counterparts in sponsoring charity fetes, although these occasions had a markedly different character, as is evidenced by the announcement about one such function published in *Al-Ahram* on 28 November 1902. The programme for this occasion featured: "Beautifully decorated pavilions in the Ezbekiya Gardens, fireworks, military music, popular *mizmar* (a reed flute) and tambourine folk music, circus acts, shadow puppet performances, Arabic songs sung by the illustrious Youssef El-Manialawi and Mohamed Effendi El-Sab'ao."

The Benevolent Islamic Morals Society, founded in Alexandria in 1889, was of particular interest to *Al-Ahram* for having founded "a refuge for orphans and foundlings" in 1902. The orphanage held its official opening on 21 October 1903. The ceremonies were attended by the Khedive Abbas II, who had donated LE2,800 toward the institution.

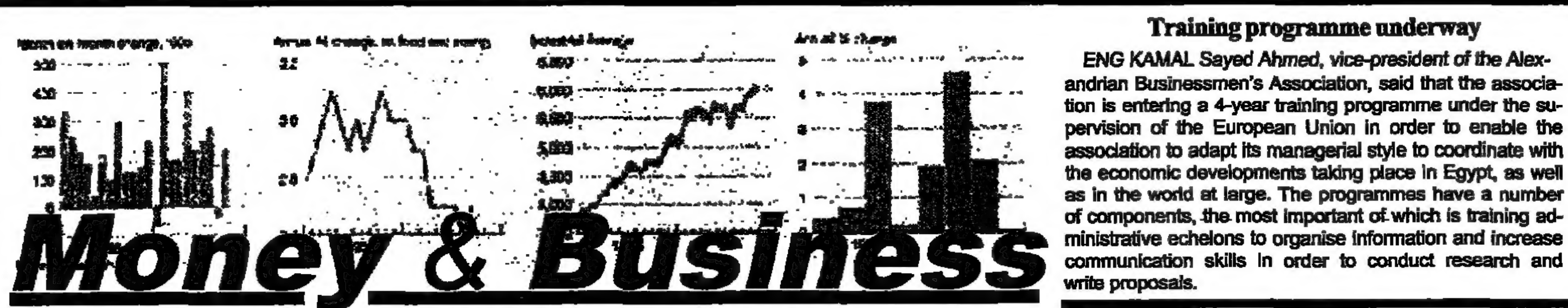
The first Coptic charity society was founded in 1881. However, the Coptic Tawfiq Society, founded 10 years later by a group of young men, soon acquired greater fame, although originally it was located in a single room in the Anglo-Egyptian club. Perhaps the major difference between the two societies was that the latter preferred to work outside the framework of the Coptic Patriarchy, which gave it a certain secular flavour, earning it much criticism by the church.

Its founders, although young in age, were all members of well-known Coptic families and, therefore, bound by a common social background as well as common objectives. These objectives, outlined in Article Two of its founding charter, were to: "assist the poor and orphans, to build schools in order to instruct boys and girls in the arts and crafts, to construct hospitals for the poor, and to establish literary societies and other such associations that will benefit the members of the Coptic community in general." Yet, it is Article Four of this charter that gave the society its unique secular character. This article stipulated that the society would not engage in or promote political or religious matters. It is perhaps one of the main reasons that accounted for the longevity of this institution.

Alongside the religious charity societies founded in Cairo and Alexandria, numerous societies were established in the provinces. Most of these tended to sponsor cultural events, as reports about them in *Al-Ahram* indicate.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.





Facilities for Arab investors

AHMED El-Amawi *confirmed in the address delivered at* the Arab Labour Conference held at the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo, that Egypt intends to grant further concessions and guarantees for investors in all fields.

He also confirmed that a national training project is underway which will be financed by the European Union.

On the other hand, Abdel-Hafez Al-Shakhanba, Jordanian minister of labour, called on all participants at the conference to apply the freedom of labour policy, while the Syrian labour minister told attendees that new technology is the key to development.

Training programme underway

ENG KAMAL *Sayed Ahmed, vice-president of the Alex*andrian Businessmen's Association, said that the association is entering a 4-year training programme under the supervision of the European Union in order to enable the association to adapt its managerial style to coordinate with the economic developments taking place in Egypt, as well as in the world at large. The programmes have a number of components, the most important of which is training administrative echelons to organise information and increase communication skills in order to conduct research and write proposals.

Fruitful cooperation between NBE and the SFD in support of youth projects

IN LINE with its constant and productive cooperation with the Social Fund for Development (SFD) to create job opportunities for graduates, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has embarked upon supporting the Developed Trade Management Project of food products and consumer goods, in a complementary effort concurrent to youth production centres.

The project will be implemented on four stages covering the span of five years. The first stage, embracing Greater Cairo and Mid-Delta governorates, aims at establishing 100 projects, creating 600 job opportunities, half of which are permanent. The SFD stipulates allocating a minimum of 30 per cent of such jobs to women.

Young entrepreneurs applying for SFD loans must have qualifying experience or hire experienced staff. Every individual project may have access to a sum of LE50,000 to finance working capital and/or equipment. This sum may be raised to LE200,000 for multi-partner projects. Moreover, loans granted to projects of special importance can exceed the said limit upon obtaining prior approval from the SFD.

Grace periods and repayment terms shall be determined according to the nature of the project, the period of capital turnover and cash flows, with a reasonable interest rate of 8 per cent annually.

In fact, NBE's participation in these projects is spelled out by its strategy to boost small-scale projects which, in turn, create real job opportunities to mitigate unemployment and enhance the economic reform efforts.

USAID programmes to assist private sector Egyptian firms

THE Egyptian private sector continues to benefit from an important USAID supported private, not-for-profit, volunteer organisation providing technical assistance, technology upgrading and quality assurance support to private sector firms. The International Executive Service Corps (IESC), has been operating in Egypt since 1976 and has assisted over 700 businesses and organisations and is directed by Mr Peter Cross.

IESC currently manages three distinct, but integrated programmes. Each programme has an office in Cairo and Alexandria and serves other parts of Egypt through these main centres.

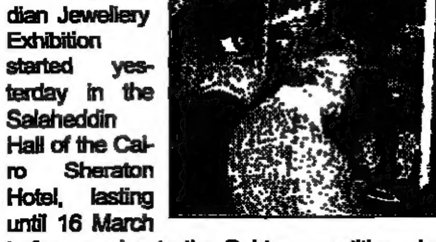
The first part of the programme is the IESC Technical Assistance (TA) programme which provides American industry experts to offer technical assistance to companies in Egypt. Specifically, the TA programme helps clients to increase productivity, develop new markets, upgrade management skills and increase exports in order to improve their companies and make them more competitive. The TA programme draws upon the ISEC Skills Bank (database) of over 13,000 American businessmen and women who are ready, willing and able to share their knowledge and expertise. Private businesses and organisations in Egypt that have been supported by the TA programme include manufacturers, banks, hotels, educational institutions, health care facilities, agricultural operations and others. Since 1976, the TA programme has provided assistance to over 800 firms in over 1,300 individual projects.

The other two IESC programmes operating in Egypt are the Quality Assurance and Manufacturing Technology Centers. Both programmes were established under the US-Egyptian Partnership for Economic Growth and Development. The CQA programme was established in 1995 with the objective of increasing the global competitiveness of Egyptian private sector businesses through enhancing their quality management systems. Specifically, the services of the CQA programme are to provide assistance in ISO 9000 quality assurance systems by offering diagnostic assessments and strategy development, assistance with quality documentation and assistance in selecting a registrar with a final goal of ISO 9000 certification. In addition, CQA offers technical assistance in cooperation with the IESC TA programme to increase productivity and upgrade the management and marketing skills of companies.

The MTC programme is designed to assist export-oriented Egyptian companies to identify, acquire and install new technologies to increase their international competitiveness. The MTC programme provides services to private sector businesses to assist them in identifying their technological needs and develop appropriate strategies to meet those needs; identifying sources of required technology information and other assistance; assisting with acquisition and installation of appropriate technology to most market needs; and supporting on-going adaptation of the new or upgraded technology.

The CQA and MTC programmes maintain cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation (MEIC) and the Ministry of Scientific Research (MOSR). In addition, both programmes collaborate with the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI).

Indian Jewellery Exhibition begins



THE THIRD Indian Jewellery Exhibition started yesterday in the Salaheddin Hall of the Cairo Sheraton Hotel, lasting until 16 March before moving to the Golden Hall of the Helnan Palestine Hotel in Alexandria from 18-22 March. The exhibition is sponsored by the Indian Embassy in Cairo and Emirates Airlines, the official carrier of the exhibition. Participating in the exhibition this year are 14 exhibitors representing top of the line jewellers from India. It is truly an opportunity that should not be missed by those interested in fine jewellery. Indian jewellers are renowned for their skill and craftsmanship in this fine art. A single piece of gold may take several years to shape before reaching the hand of the consumer as a very special and unique piece; no two are alike. Horizon Marketing Consultants say that because of the success of this event over the past years, informed customers know that March of every year means an opportunity to purchase excellent jewellery at very competitive prices.

Mohamed Al-Muairji, chairman of the board of Horizon, explained that the success of last year's exhibition was such that sales are expected to reach LE2 million this year. His noted that evidence of last year's success is indicated by an increase of the area of the exhibition and an increase in the number of exhibitors this year. These significant factors can be attributed to the excellent organisation through an agreement between Horizon and the Indian Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Organisation, which is attached to the Indian government. The Indian Jewellery Exhibition will also tour a number of Arab and European countries during the summer of 1997, the dates and places of which are soon to be announced.

Al-Muairji concluded his comments by offering thanks to all who made the past and present exhibitions a success.

Golf Fair in Egypt for the first time

UNDER THE supervision of Kamal El-Ganzouri, prime minister and head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, the first Golf Fair will be held in Egypt. Golf Fair '97 comes at a time when recreational sports like golf are gaining widespread popularity in Egypt. The exhibition will showcase major manufacturers of golf equipment and clothing, equipment for upkeep and maintenance of golf courses and parks, outdoor furniture, gymnasium equipment, swimming pool supplies, and much more. The exhibition is of interest to businessmen interested or who are currently operating in the field, in addition to athletes and others interested in outdoor recreational activities.

The exhibition, which will be held from 13-15 March at the Cairo International Conference Centre, is being organised by the Egyptian-Canadian Association, headed by Mohamed El-Gamal, who said that all efforts are being exerted to make the fair a success.

The point of Islamic banking

Just how proper is Islamic banking, asks **Niveen Wahish**

A recent advertisement by an Islamic bank, suggesting that conventional banks operate *in violation of Islamic principles, has* backfired. It has, however, revived controversy over whether these banks should be abolished.

At the root of the controversy is a television commercial for an Islamic bank which implied that interest-generating accounts fly in the face of Islamic code. In response to this commercial, a campaign was launched by the weekly newspaper, *Akhbar El-Yom*, which targeted Islamic banks operating in Egypt. The campaign charged that these banks exploit religion as a *means of attracting depositors.*

Proponents of Islamic banking, however, maintain that this campaign represents a last-ditch effort to contain Islamic banks, which have proven to be quite popular among the general public and, consequently, threaten the activity of commercial banks at a time when there is a drive to bring foreign banks to Egypt.

"These banks are part of the financial system and they have their role in the economy," said former Prime Minister Abdel-Aziz Hegazi, a career economist. "Moreover, Islamic banking adopts the principles of *Islam and, accordingly, it* should not be compared to conventional banking."

In light of this controversy, Egypt's minister of economy, Nawal El-Tatawi, announced early this week that the government has no intention of abolishing Islamic banking. *The* Egyptian financial *sector, she* said, is made up of various types of banks, including Islamic banks, all of which operate for the benefit of society. Equally important, stressed the minister, is the fact that all banks are supervised by the Central Bank of Egypt.

While El-Tatawi's statement may have ended speculation on whether these banks would be abolished in the country, they have not, however, put an end to the debate. Many Egyptians, like Ahmed Fathi, a government employee, are attracted to the idea of Islamic banking. Fathi explained that by putting his money in an Islamic bank, he shoulders no concerns about countermanding the principles of Islam. "They also provide a service whereby the *zakat* (alms tax) is automatically subtracted from my account, meaning that I don't have to worry about forgetting to pay it each year," he added.

However, the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, called attention to the *fatwa* (religious opinion) which he had issued in 1989 while serving as Mufti of the Republic. The *fatwa* states that bank deposits do not run counter to Islamic *Shari'a, as they are used for investments to* promote economic development.

"Over the last 25 years, since they first began operating, Islamic banks have succeeded in mobilising $300 billion worldwide," noted ex-premier Hegazi. Egyptian banks alone, he added, have mobilised $12 *billion over this period.*

There are currently three Islamic banks operating in Egypt: the Faisal Islamic Bank, the Islamic International Bank for Investment and Development and the Egyptian-Saudi Finance Bank. Additionally, several conventional, commercial banks have some branches also operating in accordance to Islamic principles derived from the *Shari'a*, with special attention to the prohibition of usury.

"Within this framework, Islamic banks are able to apply conventional banking rules as long as these guidelines do not contradict Islamic *Shari'a* injunctions," notes the directory of the International Association for Islamic Banks. Moreover, these banks avoid producing, financing or facilitating trade in religiously banned foodstuffs, such as pork, alcoholic beverages or gambling tools.

Elaborating on the *differences between* Islamic banks and conventional banks, Hegazi explained that while conventional banks charge a fixed interest on loans approved for projects, regardless of whether these projects succeed or fail, Islamic banks first undertake a *project feasibility study before loaning the funds* and then share in the project's profits or losses. Therefore, they shoulder a burden of risk which conventional banks avoid.

Opponents of Islamic banks, however, argue that these banks do not heed all Islamic restrictions and that their trans*actions are no different from those of con*ventional banks, mainly as a result of the fact that it would be difficult for these banks to remain isolated from the mainstream international banking system.

Ahmed Galal, executive director of the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies (ECES), views the issue from a different angle, arguing that the debate which centres on religion is one which is missing the point entirely. "Islamic banks should not be compared to *conventional banks simply* because they are different in nature," he said. What economists should study, stated Galal, is the way in which these institutions contribute to the financial market.

"Instead of arguing about how different they are from conventional banks, we should look at how they contribute to economic development and growth," he said.

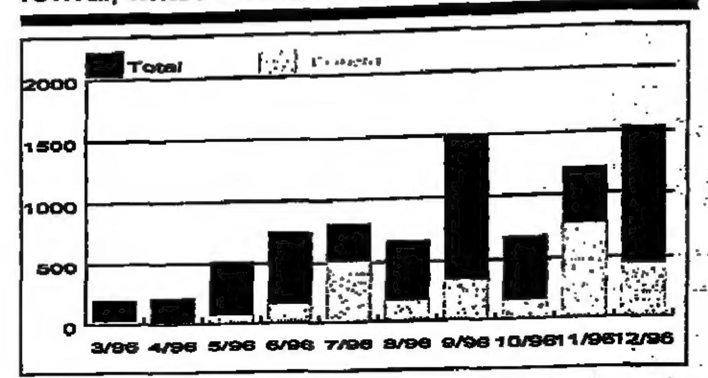
In Galal's opinion, Islamic banks share many similarities to mutual funds, the main one being that mutual funds do not pay in*terest. Instead, they give their* investors dividends. Moreover, Islamic funds, like mutual funds, mobilise resources and allocate them to different activities. Basically, he said, they are investing in equity, not simply lending out money.

A major advantage to the fact that they invest in small and medium-sized enterprises is that they help create jobs, especially at a time when conventional banks are only interested in financing large-scale projects.

"These institutions are needed by the economy, provided that proper supervision is available and their solvency is insured," he added.

Capital market boom

Success in attracting foreign investments opened the way to the Egyptian capital market's revival, writes **Mona Qassem**



In the four years following the implementation of Law 95 of 1992, the capital market has witnessed numerous significant developments, including an increase of foreign interest in Egyptian stocks.

While the influx of foreign investments was, to a great extent, the result of the successful implementation of the government's economic reform programme, these funds have actually served to accelerate the pace of privatisation and boost share performance on the stock exchange. Therefore, a kind of symbiotic economic relationship has developed between privatisation and investment — one which adds credibility to the programme and draws in more investments.

Over the 10-month period ending in December 1996, foreign capital inflows to the Egyptian capital market totaled LE2.5 billion, a figure which accounts for roughly 32 per cent of the total market capitalisation during this period. Furthermore, the number of negotiable shares owned by foreign investors was 33.8 million or 20.85 per cent of total shares on the exchange.

Law 95 has also given foreign institutions and investment funds the green light to conduct transactions on the Egyptian stock exchange. As a result, the number of foreign institutions and funds playing the market last year totaled 712.

In other reform and development efforts, the introduction of the new Central Depository System and the establishment of a clearance company in November 1996 made it possible to transfer Egyptian shares into Global Depository Receipts (GDR), which may be traded on foreign stock exchanges.

The payoff for this move is already evident. Four Egyptian companies and banks — the Suez Cement Company, the Commercial International Bank, Misr International Bank and Al-Ahram Beverage Company (ABC) — all of which offered their shares through GDRs on the London Stock Exchange, have enjoyed significant investor interest abroad. Shares of ABC, which was the last of the four to be offered on the London exchange, were 7.5-times oversubscribed.

Similarly, the establishment of Egyptian mutual funds abroad has contributed tremendously to boosting capital market activity during the second half of 1996. The three funds that have been set up in Britain, Luxembourg and Ireland, coupled with a projected increase in demand for Egyptian securities, are expected to further activate the market in the future and increase the share value and profits of both Egyptian and foreign investment funds.

Egyptian financial authorities are also exerting more efforts to attract additional foreign investments. To date, a handful of agree*ments have been concluded between Banque Misr and international* financial institutions such as the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank, the Japanese Nomura Investment Company and the Gulf Arab Investment Company to promote Egypt's capital market abroad.

Pitching for EU partnership

In the long-running Egypt-EU partnership agreement negotiations, the Egyptian side may have broken new ground, writes **Niveen Wahish**

After months of haggling over agricultural policies, Egyptian and European Union (EU) negotiators have apparently made some headway in the talks on the Egypt-EU partnership agreement.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Gamal Bayoumi, head of the Egyptian negotiating team, noted that on the technical level, the Egyptian side has made a strong case for its position. It has established that what the EU regards as being the "traditional flow of trade" is no longer feasible. The Egyptian chief negotiator spoke while the ninth *round of talks were in session earlier this* week in Cairo.

The EU, said Bayoumi, wanted Egypt to continue adopting the quotas granted to it within the context of the protocol signed in 1977. The Egyptian side, he explained, made it quite clear that these quotas which, for example, stated that Egypt could only export 7,000 tons of oranges per year, were very restrictive. Any amount exceeding this quota was subject to excessive customs tariffs.

The Egyptian team, during the ninth round of talks, was able to devise a new formula for Egypt's relationship with the EU, said Bayoumi. The basis of this revised formula will be Egypt's productive *capacity, its export capacity* and the EU market's absorption capacity as well as the assessment of quotas on exports, such as flowers, which require large investments.

On the thorny issue of agriculture, Bayoumi noted that Egypt is requesting that $1.5 billion in exports be allowed into the EU. This figure, which represents only one per cent of EU imports and 0.5 per cent of EU consumption, should pose no threat to the EU producers.

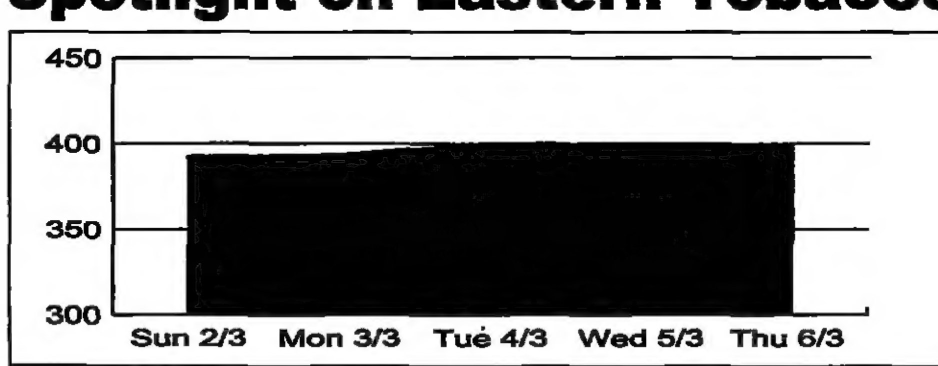
To date, states Bayoumi, Egypt's demands with regard to agriculture, no matter how small, have met with massive resistance as a result of the EU's Common Agriculture Policy. In light of this apparent impasse, he remarked that political pres*sure may be the only means of pushing this* agreement forward. To that end, significant ground has been gained from President Hosni Mubarak's recent talks with his French, Dutch and Spanish counterparts, as well as Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's meeting with the foreign ministers of the 15 EU member states.

"We have tried to get it across to the negotiators that clamping down on Egypt's exports will only result in a similar clampdown on EU export to Egypt," said the head of the Egyptian team.

There are indications, however, that the EU may finally concede some points to Egypt. "We are very close to an agreement on agriculture," said Gaston Van Duyse *Adam, the Belgian ambassador to Egypt.* "Although the difficulties are enormous and time is against us, we still hope to reach an agreement before May."

Market report

Spotlight on Eastern Tobacco



AFTER fluctuating throughout the week ending 6 March, the General Market Index finally settled at 399.32 points, 5.03 points lower than its level at the beginning of the week. However, the volume of transactions increased from LE680 million last week to LE876 million this week.

It was the Eastern Tobacco Company which captured the spotlight this week, with the trading of its shares accounting for 33.15 per cent of total market turnover. Roughly 349,200 of the company's shares changed hands, pushing the stock's value up by LE4 to close at LE100. A 215 per cent increase in the value of the Faisal Islamic Bank's shares had investors chanting *Allahu Akbar* and watching the stock price rise to LE133.61. The increase in share price comes amid a campaign against Islamic banks which are accused of using religion to attract more deposits.

Stella Beer may be popular in Egypt, but for Al-Ahram Beverage Company, *Stella*'s producer, no one was "hopping" about in delight. Once week after the company launched its shares on the London Stock Exchange, their value dropped by 5.23 per cent to close at LE148.

In other manufacturing sector trading actions, shares of the Medinat Nasr Housing and Urbanisation Company gained LE54 to close at LE501, while those of the Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation Company gained LE37 to level off at LE462. However, just one week before a scheduled 20 per cent new stock offering, shares of the Cairo Housing and Urbanisation Company plunged by 20.3 per cent to close at LE23.5. Only Telemisr offered any kind of similar competition in terms of losses, with its stock declining in value by 22.58 per cent to close at LE40.83.

In all, the shares of 61 companies increased in value, 36 declined and 32 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

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Caution in the market

A gradual strategy will prevent Egypt's economic programme from rushing into pitfalls writes **William Mikhail**

One of the reasons behind the success of the economic reform programme in Egypt is the gradual implementation of change which took into account social repercussions and observed the necessary caution during the process of converting from one economic system to another. Certain drawbacks have been noted against the current policy of rushing with gigantic, but uncalculated, steps to attract direct foreign investments. In this respect, it may be more prudent to observe caution, and proceed gradually with implementing the step-by-step policy.

Some of the drawbacks need to be pointed out in the following. *The first concerns the events that took place in the money-papers* market during the past few weeks. The International Deposit Certificates recently issued resulted in improving the performance of the Egyptian economy and, consequently, the large inflow of Arab and foreign capital. A significant portion of this capital was addressed to buying stocks, shares, money-papers and treasury bills.

This caused an unprecedented increase of more than 30 per cent on the average in money-papers prices over a few weeks only. With certain banks, and cement, flour-milling and housing companies, the ratio was in excess of 50 per cent. Their prices soared to an unfounded and unjustified level on the basis of floating assets, cumulative reserves or the value of the last dispensed coupon. Accordingly, there is no reasonable way to account for that trend from the viewpoint of the expected gain opportunities.

The rise of share prices in this manner reduced the profit yield by nearly 5 per cent for the investor buying them now. This is less than the currently prevailing inflation rate by about 2 per cent at least. For the Arab investor a profit ratio of 5 per cent is sufficient. It provides a net yield that may amount to 3 per cent, considering the low inflation rates in the countries exporting capital. That profit ratio represents a negative yield to the Egyptian investors. Many of them may consider it not remunerative. They may be led to withdraw from the money-papers market, if only for a brief span, and direct their savings towards other ventures, *such as real-estate speculation*.

In this case, encouraging foreign investors comes at the expense of the national investor. In other words, direct foreign investments are crowding out national investment. Foreign investments in money-papers by necessity and nature are short-lived. Implementing the encouragement policy may result indirectly, in this particular case, in lowered investing, which *may be designated as* "the paradox of encouraging investments".

Direct foreign investment in new projects is desirable. But the problem lies in the investor who only seeks to buy shares or treasury *bills that yield relatively high profit, without under*taking any responsibility or risk to establish new industries or enterprises. Such an investor will withdraw his capital from the market at the first indication of a better opportunity elsewhere, even one offering a minimal difference.

The investment policy in the present phase must focus on attracting direct foreign investment to the exclusion of those parts used for purchasing money-papers or treasury bills, which provide easy and secure short-term profit, but may produce a negative effect on the national investment.

Local and foreign reports confirm that the Egyptian market is not yet ready, in the short term, to undergo sudden change that will enable it to absorb the new influx of capital. The available financing at present is in excess of the offered or potential enterprises.

The opinion calling for the adoption of measures to regulate the movement of shares does not curtail the freedom of transaction in the market. Many countries have adopted such regulations before. The counter opinion against them is primarily held by brokers. Their view of the matter is to provide the appropriate climate in which the stock exchange and capital market may flourish, without due regard for macroeconomics.

The increasing demand for Egyptian currency could represent a pressure factor to boost the exchange rate. To a limited extent, this is what actually took place in the last two weeks. But it is undesirable, *in view of its ill-effects* on the trade balance. The Central Bank may not be able to withstand for long the growing pressures, if capital inflow continues at the previous rates.

The trend of a large percentage of foreign capital to buy shares and treasury bills, rather than being oriented directly to the productive economic activities, will result in a big increase in payment instruments, which may in turn raise the inflation rates over the planned levels.

One of the hazards of the large presence of foreign capital in the form of shares in existing companies, treasury bills or bank deposits concerns the market. It may become the prey of rumours. The resulting confusion may lead depositors or foreign investors to withdraw their semi-liquid investments suddenly, and thereby cause the market to crash.

To open the door wide to the movement of capital is the in*itial step and the simplest form of globalisation. A word of* warning is due concerning the danger that globalisation represents to the emerging economies. It is a big challenge to a society trying within reasonable limits to preserve the social benefits of its less fortunate members. To accomplish this, certain regulatory measures, not to mention restrictions, should be implemented with respect to the volume of capital inflow and the various aspects of activities to which they are directed. At the same time, a free and open investment climate should be gradually encouraged. The gradual strategy will prevent our economic programme from rushing into pitfalls. It will also preserve its humanitarian aspects.

The writer is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Peace-maker, deal-breaker

The irony of duplicity is that it is continuous. While President Hosni Mubarak and his US counterpart, Bill Clinton, were re-affirming the fact that they were partners in peace, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu continued to interpret the terms of peace in a language understood and accepted only by Israeli hardliners. Then again, why should he not take these liberties given that Clinton, shortly before Mubarak arrived in Washington, vetoed a UN resolution condemning Israel's decision to build the Har Homa settlement in Arab east Jerusalem.

The issue, according to Clinton, who joined Mubarak in asserting that the homes should not be built, is one of semantics. Arabs view the new construction plans as pre-empting the outcome of the final status negotiations. Israel, he said, perceives it as building on its own land. But semantics aside, Netanyahu's latest initiative is little more than a further expansion of the duplicitous policies he has embraced since coming to office last year.

In this light, the irony of considering the US as a partner in peace is that, should Netanyahu continue to appease his right-wing supporters at the expense of honouring pre-existing agreements, it could end up being a partner in nothing.

With the final status negotiations scheduled to begin shortly, it is clear that there is little time left for pandering to the interests of the US Jewish lobby or the extremist elements in Israel. In other words, Netanyahu can no longer be granted the luxury of interpreting pre-existing agreements, or pre-empting the outcome of the final status negotiations, in a manner convincing only to him and his hawkish supporters.

At this stage of the game, Israel's insistence on having the liberty to determine the size and scope of its troop withdrawal from the West Bank, for example, not only undermines the spirit of peace, but also threatens the political footing of other "partners" in the process. If the Palestinians loose confidence in Arafat's and the PA's ability to tackle the issue of statehood, right of return for refugees or the dividing of Jerusalem, then Israel could easily find itself facing an element more willing to resort to violence than words.

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What Netanyahu has to learn

Osama El-Ghazali Harb, explaining his decision to attend a meeting with Netanyahu last week, concludes that the Israeli premier will need many more such meetings before he comes to understand Arab rights

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's short visit to Cairo last Thursday took place in the context of critical developments in the peace process following the declaration of plans for Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. Netanyahu met with a group of Egyptian businessmen, then a group of intellectuals. The concern aroused by these meetings was directly linked to the tension prevailing in Cairo during the month which preceded Netanyahu's visit. The "Copenhagen Declaration" and the establishment of the so-called "international alliance for Arab-Israeli peace", were at the root of the problem.

When the alliance was first announced, sharp differences among the Egyptian intelligentsia concerning relations between intellectuals in Egypt and Israel, and "cultural normalisation", erupted publicly in an unprecedented manner. Normalisation had gradually become a "taboo" issue in Egyptian intellectual circles, which ranged from acceptance to complete rejection of relations with Israel. The rejection group claims to represent the vast majority of Egyptian intellectuals (writers, journalists, artists, etc.) — if only because the leadership of the professional syndicates belongs in large part to this trend.

Yet a large "silent" sector of intellectuals exists, including those who live in fear of expressing their views openly. Many moderate intellectuals acknowledge their acceptance of normalisation as a means of serving Egyptian national interests and supporting Egypt's commitment to peace. The most prominent among them is Egyptian novelist and Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz. The rejection group, on the other hand, emphasises the fact that boycotting Israel is the Arabs' last card. Since Israel is desperate to establish full relations with the Arabs, normalisation should be made conditional on a comprehensive, just and permanent peace, fulfilling a set of conditions: the return of all remaining Arab occupied lands to the Arabs, and recognition of Palestinian rights including the establishment of a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem for its capital.

Though this stance became slightly more flexible as the peace process progressed, Netanyahu's election represented a major set-back. The Likud's inflammatory slogans and the premier's arrogance are reminiscent of the climate of war and hatred that prevailed between Egypt and Israel prior to the peace treaty. For the first time, the generations that grew up in the post-war era heard threats of confrontation and the hostile words familiar to their fathers. These developments weakened the stance of the moderate intellectuals, who argued that Netanyahu's election was an incentive to strengthen relations with proponents of peace in Israel. While the group rejecting relations with Israel refused to talk with any Israelis, no matter what their persuasion, the moderates felt that it was possible to deal with some members of the diverse Israeli community.

The atmosphere grew more inflamed every day by Netanyahu's statements. In this context, the Copenhagen initiative was declared, generating a fierce campaign against those who had taken it upon themselves to speak out in favour of normalisation, departing from the consensus on boycotting Israel. It was necessary to ensure that the Israeli government under Netanyahu was fully aware of Egyptian public opinion, the intelligentsia's stance, and the emphatic rejection of any form of cooperation with a hostile Israel, which continued to violate Arab rights. Various opinions were voiced during the campaign. There were those who rejected peace, those against immediate normalisation, critics of the Egyptian government's policies, and those who criticised the government of Israel. While some spoke of principles, others mainly sought to settle personal accounts.

Netanyahu's visit was announced, and a meeting with businessmen and intellectuals organised. Arranging the businessmen's meeting was easy and did not arouse many comments. It was a totally different matter for the intellectuals. When the prospective participants (university professors, researchers, writers, journalists...) were first contacted, Cairo immediately began to buzz: should they attend the meeting, or collectively decline? The Copenhagen Declaration was sufficient incentive for many to refuse. It is unclear whether this was due to their objection, on principle, to sit with the Israeli prime minister, whom they consider the symbol of racism and hatred of the Arabs, because there was no hope for any positive results, or because they preferred to avoid any criticism. The pressure seems to have been so great that some of those who had promised to attend failed to show up at the last minute.

Netanyahu's meeting with the Egyptian intellectuals was held on Wednesday 5 March. It lasted for nearly an hour and half. I was one of the nine individuals who accepted and attended. In fact, from the very beginning I had not hesitated, despite the complications caused by the Copenhagen Declaration. If the Egyptian intelligentsia wish to convey a message, I believe, dialogue is far superior to boycott and rejection.

The meeting took place in one of the chambers of El-Tahra Palace. According to the view shared by the Egyptians, current Israeli policy not only obstructs the peace process, but has actually reversed the progress achieved during the past two decades. The settlement expansion in East Jerusalem, conscious, calculated violations of recognised Palestinian rights, cannot possibly lead to peace. No Arab leader, let alone any intellectual or average citizen, will accept to cede an inch of the Arab lands occupied by Israel. How can Netanyahu call on the leaders of Arab public opinion to promote a "peace culture", while the Israeli government disregards not only Arab rights, but also international law itself? Netanyahu spoke at length of his esteem for Egypt, its intelligentsia, and the economic progress it has achieved. He said there are great opportunities to work together in economic development projects, then went on to defend his record in the peace process, compared with that of the Labour Party. Netanyahu's knowledge of the Arab world, clearly, is not up to par. He lacks direct acquaintance with the peoples of the region, their civilisations and potentials. He should abandon the cocoon of narrow ideas on the historic right of the Jews to the land of Palestine.

I believe that Netanyahu needs to hold more of these meetings, but on a larger scale. This will enable him to comprehend that the Egyptian intellectuals' commitment to peace is parallel to their strong desire for justice, based on the recognition of the Palestinian people's right to an independent state, the restoration of every inch of occupied land, and equity for all parties.

The Dolly dilemma

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed probes the meaning of a scientific feat no less important than mastering nuclear energy

Dolly, the first mammal ever to be cloned from a single adult cell, is living proof of a breakthrough in cell biology comparable in scientific importance to the discovery of nuclear energy. The breakthrough, made by Dr Ian Wilmut's team in Edinburgh, was treated as breaking news all over the world two weeks ago. However, it received little coverage in the Egyptian press, perhaps because, as suggested by the *Weekly* last week, "writers feared offending the deeply rooted religious sensibility of average Egyptians".

For many, the startling achievement is anti-religious and unethical, especially if ever it is applied to humans. There is talk of chaos, indeed, of the beginning of the decline of human life as we know it. But the achievement, which touches on the very essence of life on earth and could affect the survival of the human species, cannot be dismissed out of hand. There are good reasons to believe that humans might have to resort to cloning techniques in future. The Earth summit held in Rio in 1992 recorded the fact that many species of animal and plant life are threatened with extinction because of contemporary industrial pollution, which has reduced the biodiversity that nature has built up over eons, and jeopardised the opportunities offered by genetic engineering to create new strains of organisms that can help invigorate our common pool of resources.

This is particularly vital in the field of agriculture, where dwindling resources cannot keep pace with the exponentially growing world population, which is expected to reach a staggering eight billion before the middle of the next century. Cloning could save species from extinction and become a means by which biodiversity is revitalised and the future of life on our planet sustained. In reply to those who condemn cloning as playing God, theologians have rightfully pointed out that while it is true that religion talks of the normal way of reproduction, it does not say that other forms are sinful.

But let us consider more carefully some philosophical and practical dilemmas that the Edinburgh discovery raises. US President Clinton ordered a commission to investigate the achievement, pronouncing himself "deeply troubled" and told a panel of bioethics experts to report to him in 90 days on the ethical and legal implications of the discovery. Other world leaders have called for prohibiting research on human cloning altogether.

Such decisions raise critical questions. Once a discovery has been made, can its implementation be stopped? Similar breakthroughs in the past are worth recalling in this respect. The reason the world has been spared a nuclear conflagration is the two atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, whose results were so devastating as to effectively preclude a repeat performance — at least so far. The use of lethal gases in World War I was not repeated during World War II, but such gases may have been used during the Iran-Iraq war in the eighties and have actually been used in the Tokyo subway by terrorists more recently. According to Rabbi Moses Tendler, a professor of medical ethics at Yeshiva University in New York, "in science, the one rule is that what can be done will be done".

Now, assuming that this rule is applied, and that ethical and religious objections do not stand in the way of further experimentation in the area of cell biology, the second major question is whether cloning will be successful with humans. To begin with, one must remember that, contrary to nuclear technology, cloning is rather simple and can be applied without attracting much attention. So if the breakthrough can be made, how soon is it expected? According to Cornell University biologist, W Bruce Currie, "cloning humans from adults is likely to be achievable any time from one to ten years from now". The *Washington Post* has reported that scientists from Oregon have produced monkeys from cloned embryos, noting that this was the first time a species so closely related to humans had been cloned.

But there are also serious questions as to whether cloning humans will ever be possible. According to embryologists, in sheep embryos the genes from the donor cell do not turn on until the egg has divided three or four times; in humans, these genes turn on after two divisions, a difference that might prove to be an insurmountable obstacle to human cloning. Moreover, a human clone might superficially resemble the individual from whom it is made, but is bound to differ in personality, character, intelligence, talent, etc. Because of chance factors and environmental influences that can alter the physical structure of the brain, 100 per cent identity is impossible.

Ethicists have declared that they do not object to the cloning of animals, nor to the use of genetic engineering on plants to ensure increased food supply, but categorically oppose using such techniques with humans. This raises a third question: can a clear line of demarcation be established between humans and non-humans in future cloning research?

An outright ban on human cloning is likely to be resisted from many quarters, for example, from childless couples unable to conceive through normal reproductive channels; from wealthy people who might be willing to finance the expensive technology involved in a bid to achieve immortality through cloning themselves over and over; from unscrupulous scientists trying to create a preprogrammed superior type of being, a master race, as it were, eventually, even, to reproduce a race of future Einsteins.

If human cloning becomes generalised, questions will be raised as to the viability of the institution of marriage, as well as over whether differences between the sexes are still meaningful and whether humans would want their children to be commodified, even if some theologians concede that clones do have a soul. What is certain is that Dolly's birth entails the formulation of some new Declaration of Human Rights to enable humanity to cope with the new challenge.

Art's dimensions

By Naguib Mahfouz

I particularly like Beethoven's ninth symphony. I became familiar with his *Moonlight Sonata* at Medhat Assem's house, as the host often played it on the piano. I am also especially fond of the third symphony which Beethoven dedicated to Napoleon. As for Arabic music, I appreciated the melodies of classical Egyptian composers from a very young age, specifically, Ibrahim Osman and Abdu El-Hamuli. I still remember the lyrics sung by Abdel-Hay Hilmi to the music of Zaki Murad (the father of Laila Murad, the famous singer and actress) in which the singer engages in a debate with the Jews, each side presenting its point of view through song. The later singers, Sayed Darwish, Umm Kulthoum and Abdel-Wahab, were all my favourites.

In the plastic arts, I have been impressed by Van Gogh's painting of a vast prison courtyard with the prisoners walking around in a line during their break. In fact, I have a collection of all the masterpieces of art from Greek times until the present on plates in my most precious book, *Outline of the Art of the World*. I often open the book to refresh my memory of a particular painting. As vivid as the memory may be, it rarely compares even with the vibrancy of the reproduction.

Years ago, I used to be a regular visitor to an art exhibition that was held annually on Ibrahim Pasha Street. All Egyptian artists at that time exhibited their works at the gallery, and it was there that I came to be acquainted with the works of Mahmoud Said, Mohamed Nagui and Ragheb Ayyad. I have kept an indelible memory of Said's "Alexandrian Women", Ragheb Ayyad's "The Return", and the Ethiopian painting by Nagui. Salah Taher was then still a young painter of realistic portraits, and had not yet discovered the layers of paint, thick and ornate as sculptures, for which he is perhaps best known.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Masks of Netanyahu

Al-Mussawar: "I do not know why every time we make a fresh start with you — in the hope that behind the rigid ideological mask we find a capable politician, able to seize opportunities and learn from past experiences — we are deceived. We continue to be taken by surprise by your stances and we see you as you really are: you want land and security and peace in return for negotiations that can go on for a thousand years. And you imagine that the smoothness of your tongue can deceive everyone. Forgive me, Mr Netanyahu. We wanted to welcome you on your second visit to Egypt, but the rumbling of bulldozers on the Abu Ghneim hill, usurping Palestinian land, does not give us a chance."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 7 March)

Rose El-Youssef: "Netanyahu was aware that what happened in Copenhagen constituted a breach in the Egyptian intellectuals' front which he did not hesitate to widen and enter. Before his visit and while he was still in Israel, he said that he was going to Egypt to teach the intelligentsia how to accept peace! Those who did not participate were right. No dialogue can exist between a warden and a prisoner, between... a land-grabbing thug and an unarmed person owning land. Dialogue gives the occupier a legal right to be there and gives him the opportunity to show the world he is a civilised butcher who accepts discussion with the deceased's family after attending his funeral."
(Adel Hamouda, 10 March)

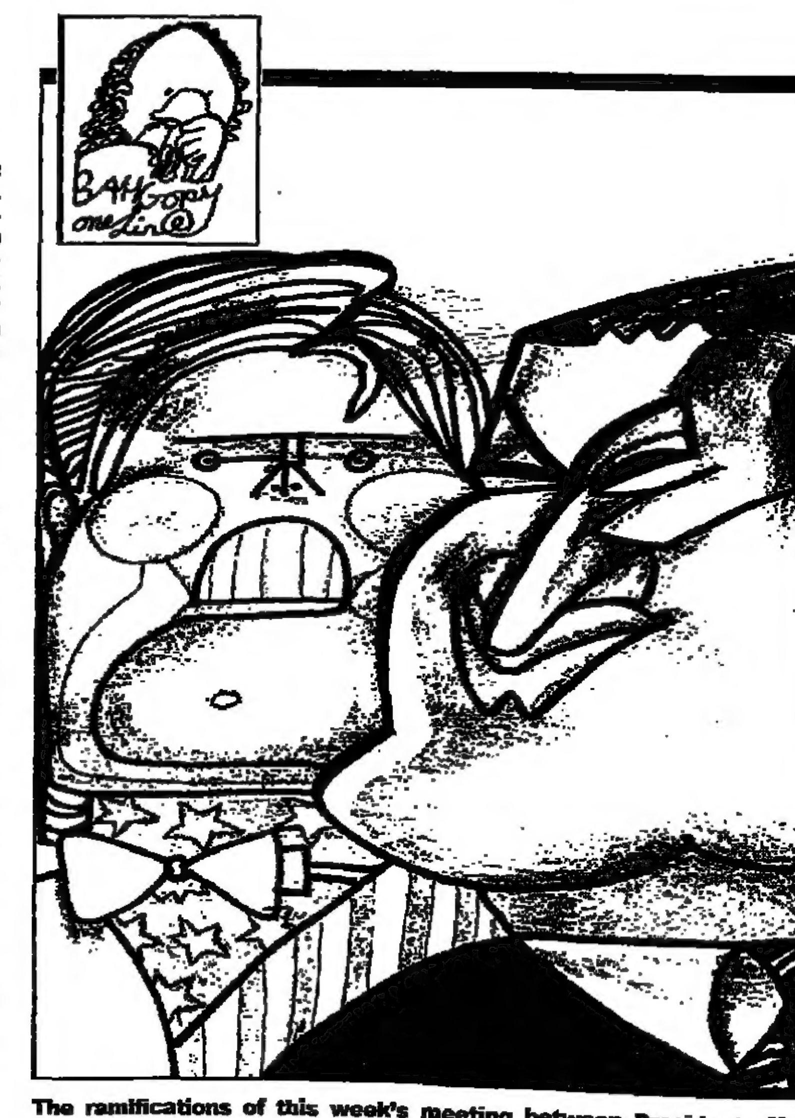
Al-Shaab: "We must awaken the people and get them to defend themselves by themselves. We must convince our rulers, through popular political pressure, to treat us with respect in the same way they treat Netanyahu. Our 'brother' Netanyahu steals Jerusalem before our very eyes and confirms this in Cairo, but still meets with respect for himself and his delegation of politicians and businessmen. We ask for equal treatment for the Egyptians and the Israelis. Our rulers must listen to us and respect our opinions and feelings and include us in decision making."
(Magdi Ahmed Hussein, 7 March)

Al-Ahali: "If we Arabs are serious about saving Jerusalem, we must launch an offensive against the Abu Ghneim settlement. It is difficult, but not impossible. It requires a programme of action which includes halting talks, only to be resumed if work on Abu Ghneim is stopped; an active defence of every inch of Jerusalem, even if the cost were one martyr per inch; this, accompanied by a diplomatic drive to mobilise international forces which support a just peace. Then it is important to hit the right note with the American guardian [of peace] which time has shown is the guardian of Israel, not peace. The battle of Jerusalem could be the turning point which will differentiate between the true enemy and the true friend."
(Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, 5 March)

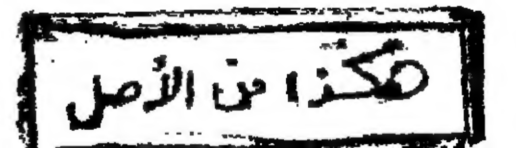
Al-Wafd: "Israeli Premier Binyamin Netanyahu arrives in Cairo today — a visit that is rejected by the mass of the people. We hope that the Egyptian government will adopt a tough stance so as not to be out of line with the people. He continues with his aggressive policies not just towards the Palestinian people or the Islamic holy places but also towards peace which Israeli politicians have upheld for nearly 20 years. We expect a tough stance with Netanyahu and his visit to Cairo so that it would not become a means of absorbing Egyptian anger."
(Editorial, 5 March)

Al-Akhbar: "I had hoped that his time in office had enabled Netanyahu to look at the facts in the Middle East with the eyes of a responsible person, one who works for the interests of his nation not against them. But after the press conference of President Mubarak and the Israeli premier, I realise that he has not studied the facts and that he is driving the region towards a conflagration. Netanyahu, do not lead the region to the brink of an explosion. The Arabs can lose more than one battle but they will never lose the war. They have fulfilled Israel's dream and have adopted peace as their strategy, so do not turn the dream of the region's nations into a nightmare, in which Israel will be the prime loser."
(Wagih Abou Zikri, 7 March)

Compiled by ***Hala Saqr***



The ramifications of this week's meeting between Presidents Mubarak and Clinton are likely to be felt throughout the region, not least on the peace process, which will hopefully receive a boost during Saturday's conference in Gaza which the US announced yesterday it will attend, despite Isreali objections.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Rational duels

Nobody can change the subject. No matter how many different kinds of conferences and symposia are held, the Arab and Islamic world will inevitably come up against the same problem. The peoples of this region must confront it, and seek a conclusive answer. The problem is: where do we stand in today's world? Can we prevent others from stealing our land, wealth, and all that we hold sacred, without sacrificing our heritage and identity? What does the West want of us, and what do we want of the West?

Last week witnessed the convening of the cultural and popular festival known as Al-Janadriya, organised by Saudi Arabia for the twelfth year running. A select group of intellectuals from the Arab and Islamic world, as well as Western European and American thinkers, participated in the event, attempting to bridge *the gap of understanding* and continuity between old and new, or rather between ancient and modern, East and West, or more specifically between Islam and the West.

Under the tent at Al-Janadriya, a remote spot in the heart of the desert not too far from Riyadh, representatives of the most contradictory schools of thought mingled in a remarkably convivial atmosphere. The latest achievements in communications and transport technology shone in a unique context: that of the desert, with its heritage and ancient traditions.

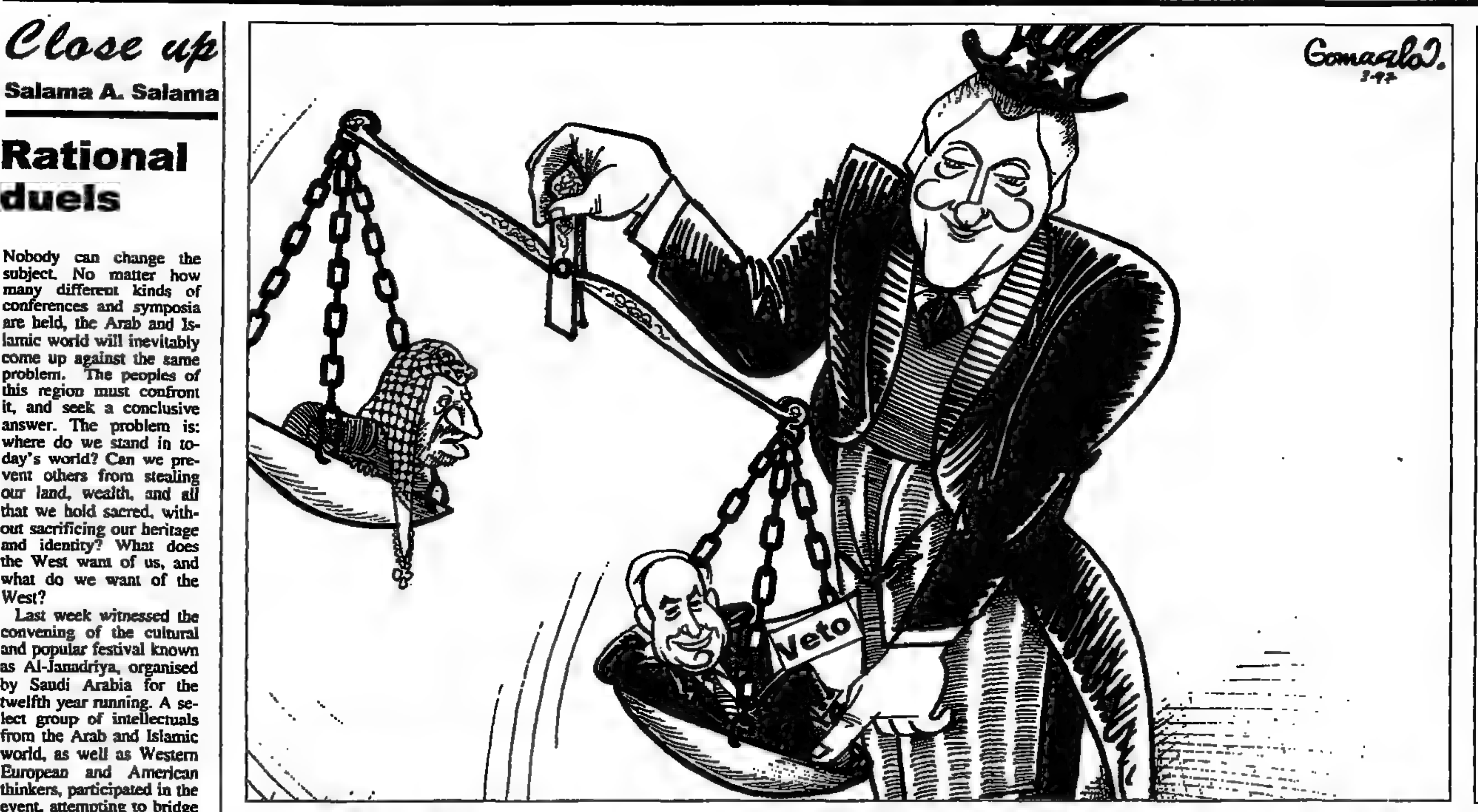
The festival brought together Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, and Engineer Al-Sa'adi, Colonel Qaddafi's son, who were seated at the same table. All the guests joined in the Bedouin sword dance, then watched an operetta illuminated by a stunning laser display — a production that vied with Hollywood's most dazzling shows. Yet the festival was hardly all play *and no work*. Its main aim was a serious and profound dialogue about the complex relationship between the West and Islam. How do Muslims appear to Europe and the US? Has the Islamic world actually become the West's enemy, hunted down and targeted for destruction?

When such sensitive and critical topics are discussed in a country like Saudi Arabia, given its central role and influence in the Islamic world, when a dialogue touches upon the responsibility of the *Islamic communities* themselves for the distortion that damages their image, such a dialogue should be considered an objective *step forward* in the structural development of thinking processes, culture, the ability to practice self-criticism and détente vis-à-vis the outside world.

But most dialogues simply go around, then return to the same complex questions of policies and practices. Will the violent struggles in Turkey divest it completely of its Islamic identity, *at the price of* its acceptance as a second-class member, or even less, in the European Union? Can the meaning of the Islamic threat to the West be Arab and Muslim hostility towards Israel, a stance stemming from its violation of Palestinian rights, usurpation of Arab lands, and occupation of Jerusalem? Is this sufficient reason for Islam to be considered hostile to the West in America?

Perhaps the questions posed are more numerous *than the* answers given. But such dialogues will continue to provide a sort of rationale training, stimulating the intellect like a duel of ideologies. As such, they will remain *suspended* in the air, unless they come down to the reality of the Arab and Muslim *communities by stepping* out of closed rooms and halls, and inviting the effective participation of young people.

Most Arab thinkers and intellectuals exercise this freedom of thought. Yet they give no reply to the principal question: how can stagnant waters in the Arab and Islamic communities be stirred and set into motion?



Soapbox

Eternal Jerusalem

Jerusalem today is the focal point in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The status of Jerusalem is taking shape, although officially, the issue has been relegated to the final status negotiations. Netanyahu and his racist cohorts are establishing new conditions on the ground. They aim not only to take control of more occupied territory in the West Bank, but also to fragment this land and isolate each section, rendering the creation of an independent Palestinian state impossible.

Despite all Netanyahu's allegations that Jerusalem is the eternal, united capital of Israel, in seeking to justify the settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim on the grounds that it is "Jewish property", he inadvertently admits that Jerusalem has been, and will remain for all time, an Arab Islamic city.

Despite the new law passed by Jordan imposing the death penalty on any person proved to be selling land to non-Arabs, legal measures alone are insufficient. Under conditions of extreme poverty and crushed by the decades of occupation, some Palestinians may sell their land to Israelis for exorbitant sums. Arab buyers must be ready to buy all the property offered by Arabs, at whatever *price*

Entitled to own real estate anywhere in Israel, the one million Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948 are the ideal purchasers. Funds must therefore be established to conclude and register purchases of real estate in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is Arab, and the capital of the independent Palestinian state. Until this objective is achieved on the ground, we must engage in battles to defend each stone in the city, which the racist occupiers are steadily chipping away.



This week's Soapbox speaker is an expert on Palestinian affairs and a columnist with the Al-Shaab *newspaper.*

Mahgoub Omar

Between intimidation and confusion

Two trends have joined in attacking the Copenhagen Declaration, argues **Lutfi El-Kholi** in this part of his series on the efforts to build an Arab-Israeli peace alliance, the intimidators, with their poisoned arrows, and the yes-no group, unable to make up their minds

The debate among advocates and detractors of the Copenhagen Declaration is a healthy phenomenon, a channel through which Arab societies can regain their intellectual vitality. Once again, the complex regional and international aspects of an interesting issue are being scrutinised in this intense debate on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the mechanisms for its management at the government and popular levels. The process is of critical im*portance at this juncture in the history of the conflict, in* light of the Intifada, the Madrid conference, the Oslo and Wadi Araba accords and the rise of Netanyahu to power in Israel at the head of a Likud government that has all too clearly demonstrated its fanatic Zionist ideology and antagonism to a just and comprehensive peace.

Nor have the accusations slung at those who met with Israelis marred the debate. Agent, traitor, Quisling: these are only a few of the epithets chosen by intellectual or political figures in order to intimidate those who differ with them on any issue. It is their alternative to rational dialogue and respect for the human intellect which, by definition, make careful study and thorough analysis prerequisites to offering an opinion. This course is intellectually taxing and time consuming, and requires a minimum degree of knowledge. It is far more convenient to discredit one's ideological adversaries by ridiculing and deriding them, since insults are always available, require no time to ponder, and spare the attacker from the rigidities of rational argument.

To cite but one example, in the 17 February issue of *El-Arabi*, the newspaper of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party, Professor Salah Sadeq wrote: "It is more necessary than ever that all patriotic forces, through a thoroughly planned campaign, uncover and prevent this assault of normalisation and seek all available means to disgrace those waging it, with the hope that they will desist and that those who might be wavering are spared *public humiliation.*"

Tarnishing others' reputations, unfortunately, is a favourite pastime among the Arab intelligentsia. Anyone who ventures a contrary opinion, a new way of thinking or any view that departs from "holy", traditional and long-established views is insulted. As Dr Salah Sadeq himself suggests, this involves a campaign to "deter" those who might sympathise, or even waver undecided. It is the surest way to dissuade anyone who might contemplate joining the "agents" on the other side. Fear of ignominy and public opprobrium compel many to hide their true opinions and even to retract and contradict them if called to account.

Even such forms of bullying and intimidation have been useful. They have cast into stark relief the true extent to which the ethics of dialogue and the scope of rational discourse have receded before the onslaught of verbal abuse. The trend is indicative of serious problems in our socio-political life, problems that must be clearly *identified and resolved so that we may generate a more* mature body politic and fortify it with the appropriate armour in order to render it receptive to democratic values and capable of sustaining the costs of civilised mechanisms of political and intellectual plurality, rational argument and mutual respect.

Returning, then, to the question at hand, why was this broad ranging debate to be expected?

The Copenhagen Declaration has laid the foundations for a new cultural-political reality in the course of the Middle East conflict for both Arabs and Israelis. For nearly half a century now, this conflict has been dominated by the logic and dynamics of war and varying degrees of military confrontation. Neither of the sides immediately involved, however, has been able to refute the existence of the other or to impose the "solution" hoped or planned. In other words, a "unilateral military solution" has become impossible, now and in the foreseeable future. Even to attempt the impossible under current regional and international conditions, given the horrifying developments in traditional arsenals and in nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction could never be sustained by either side, economically, politically, or socially, not to mention in purely humanitarian terms.

As the conflict has developed without war or the pros*pect of war since 1973, the parties involved have come* to perceive the need for new methods with which to manage it peacefully, while realising that the reasons for war remain unchanged. Both sides have had to yield to the pressing need for internal economic development and the pressures of the international community. This process was set into motion with the Camp David peace accord, and has become relatively stable although the two leaders who initiated it, Anwar El-Sadat and Menachim Begin, have disappeared from the Middle East stage, one through assassination, and the other through retirement and finally death. Since then, attempts to derail this peace treaty have failed, the Intifada has succeeded in putting the notion of a Palestinian state alongside Israel on the peace agenda and Israel has failed to neutralise Egypt.

In 1991, the Madrid conference initiated what one might term a transitional phase in the conflict, marking the divide between war and peace, with all the potential the latter has for the region. *During this phase, we will* either manage or fail to bring about a just and comprehensive settlement. Like all transitional periods in history, it is complex, fraught with risk and peril, and charged with emotion, painful memories and major sacrifices. Both sides continue to view the other with animosity and suspicion, yet they are forced to engage in a negotiating process which continues to flounder and suffer major setbacks.

Only governments possess the power and jurisdiction to negotiate and conclude treaties. Negotiations, however, are still only one aspect of the peace process. The other is the movement of popular forces and the need to rally the mass energies they represent in order to give impetus to this process, to monitor the adherence of all parties to the established terms and principles and to pressure for a just and comprehensive peace.

This dynamic has so far been largely lacking. Popular monitoring and pressuring of the peace process cannot be effective, as the history of all major human conflicts in the 20th century have demonstrated, unless the peoples of both sides are directly involved in a collective endeavour to effect peace. In general, this dynamic is initiated by a collection of intellectuals who are aware of the significance of the grassroots factor and who therefore take it upon themselves to set this dynamic into motion.

If we look closely at the course of events, since the Intifada exploded if not before, we find that groups of intellectuals and broad sectors of public opinion on both sides of the conflict had made the transition from espousing the "unilaterally imposed military solution" to advocating a just and comprehensive settlement. Such groups have increasingly been making their presence felt in Israel, for example through the Peace Now movement, in the Arab world, even if no specific organised peace movement has been established, and globally, particularly in Europe.

These advocates of peace, however, have lacked *a* mechanism to bring them together. There are numerous reasons for this. The motivation to explore the potential for joint popular/cultural action, however, has remained compelling. Consequently there has been an undercurrent of movement, since the end of the '80s, to hold closed and unpublicised dialogues between Arab and Israeli intellectuals in Europe and the US.

Between 1989 and 1995, 29 to 32 such meetings have been held, bringing together certain Arab and Israeli intellectuals. The Arabs who participated in these meetings included Islamists, communists, Arab nationalists, Nasserists, leftists and liberals. Among the most noted names were Fahmi Howeidi (Egypt), Hassan Al-Turabi (Sudan), Mohamed Sid-Ahmed (Egypt) and Mohamed Aziz Shoukri (Syria). In spite of these many years of ef*fort, these people had not managed to overcome the* Arab people's refusal to negotiate with Israel. In part this was due to the participants' unwillingness to come out into the open and face up to their responsibility before the public. In part, too, it was due to the lack of an international sponsor capable of participating and supplying moral and material support.

The Copenhagen conference held in January 1997 followed, and resulted from, the Israeli Labour government's brutal invasion of Lebanon, the subsequent rise to power of the Likud government led by Netanyahu, and Israel's refusal to implement the accords it signed with the Palestinians and to resume negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Unlike its predecessors, this conference was held openly, ending the train of futile, secretly held dialogues, and unveiling the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace.

The declaration aroused diverse and sometimes contradictory political and ideological positions. Some op*posed it on the grounds that they reject the principle of a* political settlement. Others criticised the use of the term "alliance" and objected to the fact that it includes right-wing Israelis. The participants in Copenhagen were also accused of prematurely promoting normalisation with Israel, breaking the united Egyptian and Arab front, and showing indifference to fundamental issues such as the creation of a Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem, the Israeli settlements, and occupied Syrian and Lebanese territory. These issues I will address in forthcoming articles. What is important here, however, is that the opposition was expressed in various forms, ranging from the intimidation campaign I mentioned at the outset of this article, to what I call the "yes-no" school, characterised by contradictory babbling.

Like the intimidators, the "yes-no" school is very much a part of our intellectual climate. It is sad that some of our most prominent and influential intellectuals, individuals who cannot avoid addressing the thorny issues before us without risking their intellectual aura, must somehow contrive to appear both "for" and "against" certain issues. They seem torn between their capacities for objective analysis and rational argument and various psychological restraints. They seem to retract on the arguments they propose and void them of any true substance, leaving their listeners wondering what their point, let alone their position, might be.

Perhaps the foremost representative of this school recently has been Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. This noteworthy figure has declared himself in favour of a dialogue between Israeli and Arab intellectuals. This, he said, did not represent a step toward normalisation. But virtually in the same breath, he alleged that the dialogue that founded an international alliance was a form of negotiation, a spurious one at that, and accused the Arabs who participated in the dialogue of adopting positions suspiciously close to the Israeli line on pivotal issues.

In *Al-Hayat* on 28 January 1997, two days before the *Copenhagen Declaration was made public, and therefore* before he was able to see the text, Sid-Ahmed wrote: "I cannot foresee success for a process that requires Arab intellectuals to make the leap, in one go, from total boycott of Israel to an alliance with that country's intellectuals." Since this time, he has intensified his opposition to the Declaration as an idea, a system and a movement. Only three months prior to the Copenhagen Declaration, however, he, along with Abdel-Moneim Said, had made a personal appeal for a popular alliance. In a meeting held in September 1996 and attended by a number of Palestinian and Egyptian intellectuals, politicians and diplomats, Sid-Ahmed made an impassioned plea for the formation of an alliance between Arab and Israeli advocates of peace against the enemies of peace on both sides. Moreover, the "Arab-Israeli al*liance" he called for in his paper was initially to be re*stricted to Arabs and Israelis alone, without the participation of outside international powers. The title of this paper was "The Alliance for Peace in the Middle East." I had the good fortune to obtain a copy of it recently from some Arab colleagues. The author opens as follows:

"Recent developments in the Middle East give cause for considerable anxiety. The progress that has been made toward peace over the past three years threatens to come to a halt and the improvement in the psychological climate and the mutual confidence built between the Arabs and Israel have come to be jeopardised by the increasing influence of those elements on both sides of the conflict who are hostile to peace."

What solution does he propose? "It has become essential for the forces of peace to regain their initiative and dynamism through the formation of an alliance for peace that comprises the forces in the region that support peace. *One factor that most be treated carefully in* this regard is the fact that the size of the forces of the peace in the region, both in the Arab countries and in Israel, is far greater than appears on the surface."

Sid-Ahmed proceeds to detail the "aims" of the alliance he has appealed for. Heading the list was "to help the forces of peace in Israel overcome the state of depression and paralysis they have entered as a result of the recent elections." He then clarifies the precise nature of this alliance. It is "an unofficial movement that converges upon the following broad principles: 1) to achieve a just and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israel, based on the principle of *land for peace*; 2) to establish a Palestinian state; 3) to halt Jewish settlements in occupied Arab territory; 4) to stop all measures that may alter the geographical, historical and demographic realities on the ground, inclusive of Jerusalem, until the final phase of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority has concluded; 5) to establish normal relations between the *Arabs and Israel*; 6) to realise cooperation between the peoples of the region in the interests of development and progress; and 7) to resist the enemies and adversaries of peace on both sides."

Finally he adds, "The aims of this alliance could find support among a broad segment of Israeli society, from the political centre to the left. The inclusion of *this* bloc is essential for the alliance to accomplish its goals. As for the Arab side, the alliance should include individuals and groups from the countries that have already covered considerable ground on the path to peace: Egypt, Jordan and Palestine." (The author omits Syria and Lebanon).

Little remains to be said about the two trends that characterise the current climate of intellectual intercourse. We are left, however, with several crucial questions. To what extent do these schools influence one another in their ideological and political activity? What is the extent of damage, or good, that this mutual in*fluence brings to the quality of dialogue, intellectual* life, and the enlightenment of public opinion? How does it contribute to new and original thinking on how to conduct the Arab-Israeli conflict, regionally and internationally at this intensely fragile transitional phase in the peace process, after half a century of periodic war with no solution, and with the many prospects of peace ahead of us?

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

What dialogue?

Why did Israel withdraw from Sinai? One explanation which seems to be gaining credence these days is that Israel did so as a result of Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and his willingness to engage in "dialogue" with its leaders, foremost among whom was Stern gang leader, veteran terrorist and Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate, the then prime minister of Israel, Menachem Begin. Presumably, if one is to make any kind of sense out of this "popular" explanation, Sadat, in resorting to "dialogue rather than confrontation", overwhelmed the Israeli ruling elite, Likudniks and Labourists alike, with his wit, charm and force of logic to such a degree that they realised the error of their ways, gave *him* a big ovation in the Knesset, and eventually handed Sinai over to him.

Another explanation, not as influenced perhaps by the world view of American TV anchors, would possibly prioritise such less sublime factors as the 1973 October War, the oil boycott, the fact that Sadat had dumped his erstwhile Soviet allies and turned wholeheartedly to "my friend Henry [Kissinger]", his Open Door economic policy, his eradication of the Nasserist legacy, his fierce confrontation with what, at the time at least, seemed a highly threatening left-wing-led movement of students and workers, and the effects all this may have had on American policy vis-à-vis the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.

Such a perspective, moreover, would take into account the Israeli leaders' appreciation of Sadat's visit, not so much as a reflection of his enthralling intellectual prowess, but rather of his having delivered them, free of charge, an Arab recognition of Israel which until then the Arabs had held as a negotiating card, to be delivered only upon, or even in conjunction with, Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied after the June War. In fact, they had a sensible argument: "How can we recognise a state when we don't know its borders?" All this, of course, is water under the bridge.

Sadat's most powerful argument, however, did not need the crutch of "dialogue". The "gesture" of a trip to Jerusalem, or previous contacts via Kissinger, or secret meetings in Casablanca had clearly indicated his willingness to go it alone. To remove the largest, most industrialised and best armed Arab country from the confrontation was, from an American/Israeli perspective, priceless — and in fact, Israel paid a very cheap price for this veritable jewel of the peace process, as can be discerned from a glance at the inequities of the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. The agreement to disarm huge tracts of Sinai, and severely restrict Egyptian military presence throughout the rest of the peninsula, while Israeli forces remain a stone's throw away from Egyptian territory, is just one of these small disparities.

Now I can possibly understand that a north European may truly believe the American TV anchors' version of the reasons behind the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai — endless dark winters coupled with a worthy ignorance of the experience of the colonised may well make one susceptible to the kind of world view propagated by cable television. What is truly surprising, however, is that Arab, and Arab intellectuals to boot, could advocate such a version of our own, lived, history.

But notwithstanding the fact that not even an American TV anchor would cite the US's withdrawal from Vietnam as an instance of "dialogue between enemies" leading to just solutions — to be brutally frank, the death of some 57,000 American soldiers must have had something to do with it — the recent elegies in praise of dialogue seem totally oblivious to 30 years of continuous and intense Arab-Israeli dialogue. Is Egyptian intellectual prowess supposed to be so devastating as to outweigh the concerted efforts of nearly two million Palestinians who, since June 1967, have been living with the Israelis, literally and figuratively leaving no stone unturned to put their point across to their occupiers, struggling, arguing, discussing, advocating, conducting research, writing, talking, appealing to the courts and, indeed, making alliances with those Israelis who would support their cause?

Add to this the additional "detail" that there are some 750,000 Palestinian "Arab-Israelis" who have lived in Israel since it was created, have Israeli citizenship, and, along with their Israeli comrades, have been engaging in non-stop "dialogue" with Israelis for the past 49 years — including in the Knesset itself — and you must come to the conclusion that paucity of dialogue is not exactly one of the major obstacles to a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Even if one, in an age of revolutionised communications, concedes that direct, face to face encounters are necessary for a dialogue to be fruitful, I have little doubt that non-Palestinian Arab intellectuals have had thousands of encounters with their Israeli counterparts since the founding of the state.

So let's get serious. The point is not the actual dialogues but their symbolic effect. *This, in essence*, is to end the Egyptian popular boycott.

David Blake on high fashion and its antidotes



Moushira Issa in performance, drawn by George Bahgory

Dressed and undressed

A symphony orchestra is the magical fabric which clothes itself and every one who plays with it. In the first of three concerts here, of 7 March, the enlarged Cairo Opera Orchestra under its director Ivan Filev was fully clothed. In a second concert, on 8 March, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra managed to be equally well turned out in performance with Butch Thompson. In a third concert, however, of 9 March, with Moushira Issa, the draperies were rent.

On 7 March Filev gave a Stravinsky programme interesting because it began with the great Russian in his later, sparsely clad days, before taking us back to the earlier, more opulent period, the high fashion era of the *Fire Bird* and Diaghilev. The *Bird* was almost Bakst-like in style and received from the players a performance both apt and fitting. It scintillated, flashed and wove its cunning way to glory at the end.

The Cairo Opera Orchestra was never an orphan. It had parents but its use was limited to the ballet. Since there is hardly any opera now in Cairo except the old old favourites like the Masked Ball, they spruced it up a bit, enlarged its repertoire and it now gives highly enjoyable concerts on its own as a symphony orchestra. It has a new life now and plays well for some conductors and less so for others. At its best it can be more than exciting.

The Stravinsky night was thrilling. Filev understands glamour in music. He knows when and how to curve tones so they arch upwards and shine for an audience. He understands Verdi's *Ballo in Maschere* though most conductors do not. He feels very strongly the *Fire Bird*. All that inky black beginning of this seminal work is surely hell. The bird shoots up out of the blackness into the light like a rocket and Filev left us in no doubt that wherever she appears she brings her very dubious beginnings with her. This bird is no tame, well-fed fowl, destined for suburban dinner tables. She is the sucubus herself.

Filev is a good story-teller. In the lullaby section the sound was drowsy. Massive, heroic music for the prince. The cradle song was soft, woollen music. The entire orchestra gave out the tune of the final peasant song with the great care that this fugue that ends the music deserves.

The bird, impatient, flares aloft, feathers ruffled in a dragon's blood stain. The magic city is built. The bird triumphant. Stravinsky's *violin* concerto comes from a later time. It is a prickly, barbed-wire work, difficult to love and hard on the notes. They crackled like power fusers.

In the second part, the concerto goes deep into tragic mood. Wolfgang Marschner, adept at this work like Filev, focused on every part that suggested warmth. Their devotion made it sound at times Viennese, which would probably have made Stravinsky mad.

After the hang-man's rope that haunts movements two and three, and the staccato *flying debris of the first movement* thick with difficult virtuoso passages — a metallic rainstorm of double stops and slides — the arms of the player seemed engrossed in action. But it closes as it opens, cold and unlovable, with the soloist as the hero of this spectacle of a Tiffany lamp being smashed to bits.

The opening peace of the Pulicnella today seems a bore. The pastiche of ancient music, knowing and condescending, has been worked to pieces. It is clear and sharp, but though intending to be brisk is a limp rag, and wet.

Concert number two, dressed with accessories by the Cairo Symphony as support, introduced the American clarinet and piano player Butch Thomspon. Tall, laconic and laid back, these qualities suited the music he played and the atmosphere he projected.

Spring is coming and so are the pianists, hail stones of them, global wanderers of the big black dream box. Everyone loves the piano, flesh, fish and fowl. It is nice to buck the classical piano strangle-hold and Butch Thompson did this. He is a classic jazz player with the flying rubber wrists these players seem to need. It certainly rolls them back into that position at the keyboard only a few classic players dare assume. Irreverence is not the right road to Beethoven they say, but it is fine for Eubie Blake and Jelly Roll Morton.

Thompson began the concert with two solos after the Cairo Symphony had done its way with the *Barber of Seville*. *The Charlston Rag* and a blue piece by Jelly Roll Morton both set the tone. But what is it? It is now the sound of history. No other music can ever imitate it or thread a path through its subtlety of emotional impact. It exudes for a listener time, race history and passion, and you can go on adding your own variations for nothing rivals its immediate impact, and as played on a piano by a player with the gifts of Thompson it also rolls you, the listener, over. When Thompson strolled into the very first interrupted silences of the divine *Jelly's Blues*, you can be lost at the subtlety. Chopin understood no more about the piano as elegy. Joy and blues made the night.

Eubie Blake's *Memories of You* was too lonely ever to forget. The Cairo Opera audience was witnessing the first of two metamorphoses, the second would soon follow.

And the concerto-like *Yamekraw Overture* brought the Cairo Symphony into the show again. Date of composition 1927. It was followed by *Body and Soul for clarinet and orchestra*, which showed Thompson a two instrument virtuoso. Various Rags, old New Orleans jazz, circa 1915, showed that this music was way out in front.

The night ended with Scott Joplin's suite for piano and orchestra arranged by Gordon Wright. Joplin is for you or against you. Too much goes stale. His programmes never vary, nor do the *instrumental arrangements. Pretty*, sad, but nothing to belong with what had gone before.

The third evening was plain, undressed, with no rapport or comfort in anything. Moushira Issa, in a striking black dress, was mistress of her fate. Being a phenomenon, she does as she likes. She is a relative who descends upon a family luncheon with her many-faceted moods. If she is in a good one, the confrontation can develop into real drama. She can throw the cutlery around or her shoes. If she is happy she will sit and enchant the company. Nothing she ever does is small. She has a manner of largesse about her and a gift for self-mockery.

On this particular night she enchanted. Whatever can be said about her, she is dedicated and obsessed about the piano and the music she plays. Whatever happens Moushira is generously giving, nothing cool, no fudge. Great assets in the travelling pianist's flight bag.

The opening Bach in C minor, *Prelude Fugue*, was in the grandest Landowska manner. No quibbles about authentic sound. Hanging the fashion — this was a big concert-grand in an opera house — she let fly grandiose calls which gave rich pleasure and this carried on through the prelude which went like a wind. For some at least this was Bach, and really quite immense.

As for her Beethoven *Tempest Sonata*, during its performance the red curtains and the entire opera stage disappeared. We were in a Ingres concert room packed with resplendent people listening. Sometimes she made slips, but no matter, such things are merely human. The entire noble colouring, turning first to the Southwind then to the North, never found her wanting.

Moushira Issa's phrasing is her greatest joy. *The Tempest* went like the wind with each melody topping the other in nuance. The Chopin group was arduous. She was stretched to the limit. The phrasing was never distorting, however, and she grew clear as crystal as the cruel extensions took her to the limits *of the keyboard. The three Scriabin Etudes* lessened the tension of the Chopin and Issa had brought her concert to an end.

The Chopin Ballad in F major was a triumphant showing of what dedication can do. She left the platform outside herself.

Theatre

Vissi d'arte

Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony's solo piece Callas serves as an indictment of the power of the spectator, writes **Nehad Selaiha**

Early last year, Austrian choreographer and dancer Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony conducted a dance-theatre workshop at Al-Hanager Centre which lasted three weeks. An earlier visit to Egypt in 1989 with her riveting version of Sartre's *Huis Clos* had won her Best Performance from the international jury of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre and Best Director from the Egyptian critics. She was already a much admired and deeply respected figure when she arrived on her second visit, and by the end of the three weeks she had also secured the warm affection of everyone who came in touch with her. The group she worked with were mostly amateurs, including some who had never had any training in dance, classical or modern. The result, however, a compressed version of Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck* performed on a bare stage, was so stimulating and encouraging that it was decided to pursue the project the following year over a longer period.

At the Goethe Institute, which had co-sponsored the workshop, the group continued to train along the lines she had laid down, and when she arrived on 24 February for the second workshop which, thanks to the contribution of the Austrian Embassy, will last for two months this time, she was pleased to find her pupils in good shape. Originally, Lerchenberg-Thony had wanted to work on Egyptian material and decided on two short stories by Latifa El-Zayyat and Alifa Rif'at centering on the relationships of men and women. The idea was to explore with the group the rhythms and modes of physical expression in Egypt and their cultural underpinnings. Unfortunately, the plan ran into difficulties and had to be abandoned. It is now back to *Woyzeck*, in a fuller version this time, and the performance is scheduled for 24 April.

But apart from the valuable work she is currently doing at Al-Hanager (intensive sessions from nine to five, six days a week), Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony gave two performances last week of her latest creation, *Maria Callas*. To describe this work as a dance piece would be inaccurate. It is first and foremost an intensely dramatic work that foregrounds the stunning resource of Lerchenberg-Thony as an actress. Like Chekhov's *The Swan Song*, it is a dramatic study of the plight of the artist as he or she feels the approach of old age and death, the fading away of talent, the decline of fame and the neglect or positive animosity of audiences and former worshippers.

For Lerchenberg-Thony, Callas became the embodiment of this plight. After reading four biographies of the opera singer, she became firmly convinced that it was not a heart attack that put an end to her life at the age of 54: 'No. The audience killed her,' she stoutly assured me. This ruthless, 'murderous' audience is structured into the work not only through recordings of an audience alternately applauding and hissing and booing in response to the various Callas arias that punctuate the performance, but also through the basic plan of the choreography. The stage is divided into two areas: the back, representing the artist's lonely retreat where she sits, undressed, in a black slip among the relics of the past — a few of the sumptuous costumes she once wore in various roles and a pile of old newspapers with reviews of her work together with all the scandalous gossip that once surrounded her. Beyond the line of newspapers lies the public arena with four camera-like spotlights on stands outlining it. There, she reenacts various moments of her tempestuous career. The key of the compositional pattern was one of advancing and retreating between the two areas in a variety of moods ranging from defiant pride to cringing fear. Alexander Zemlinsky's music provided the perfect accompaniment to these moods, embodying the different shades of feeling.



Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thony

Eschewing anything obviously sensational or spectacular, Lerchenberg-Thony relied on an almost ascetically limited vocabulary of movement and gesture, drawing mainly upon the expressive power of her face and eyes to engage the audience in the drama and convey meaning. Gradually, as she repeatedly stands downstage, gazing out in bitterness, reproof or defiance at us as the sounds of the hooting, booing, or rapturously applauding audience fills the hall, and by a curious process of transformation we become Callas's audience and share their guilt. It was an invitation to consider the strange and precarious relationship of all performers to all audiences. *At the end of* the performance, I was almost shy of applauding, having become conscious of myself as part of the amorphous mass that lurks in the dark and whose arbitrary judgements can make or break a performer.

Through economy of movement and props, and well-judged use of stillness and silence, Lerchenberg-Thony created a perfect balance between movement and music, allowing Callas's arias their full impact. Judith Wegener's costumes showed a deep understanding of the power of different fabrics and colours to express mood and feeling. Together with Peter Jeremias's restrained and understated but eloquent lighting, they created an ambiance that partook of the same paradoxical mixture of austere simplicity and sensitive subtlety of Lerchenberg-Thony's performance.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Makram Henein (Drawings)
Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dorr St. Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 13 March.

Huda Lutfi
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-8pm. Until 17 March.
Paintings under the title Woman and Memory.

Gamal Abdel-Nasser (Sculptures)
British Council Gallery, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 344 8445. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 17 March.

Max Skladanowsky: film pioneer, producer, businessman and photographer
Goethe Institute, 5 El-Bustan St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 17 March.

Andrei Boubentsov and Vasili Poliakov (Paintings)
Russian Cultural Centre, 127 Tahrir St, Dokki. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 March.

Dina El-Gharib and Mohamed Abdel-Moneim (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 22 March.

Mohamed Mandour and Abdel-Rahman El-Nashar
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St. (corner of Montaza St) Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 22 March.

Effat Hosny (Paintings)
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 22 March.

The Other Half of the Sky
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St. Zamalek. Tel 341 5723. Until 25 March.
Featuring works by Renata de Mattia (engravings), Lidia Costantini (photographs) and Fadia Badrawi (multimedia) on the occasion of Women's Day.

Peggy Crawford (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 27 March.
The artist's 34 coloured photographs, including houses, villages, temples, doors, façades, huts and mosques, built of mud, reeds, coral and stone portray the Yemeni traditional architecture built of the earth.

Three Contemporary Visions
Khan El-Maghraby, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 29 March.
Works by Sabri Mansour, Said Hedaya and Salem Salah.

Mohamed El-Gabry (Mixed Media)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. *Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. 17-29 March.*

Gathering
Cairo Atelier, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri mornings, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. 16-30 March.

Spring (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri & Sat. 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 March.
Group exhibition.

Salah Enani's Cin-[illegible] (Paintings)
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. el 354 7951. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 March.



Three contemporary visions

Abbas El-Sheikh
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm. 15-30 March.
Exhibiting pottery, sculpture, coins and stamps.

Egyptian Features (Paintings)
Riash Gallery, 6 El-Gezira El-Wosta St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9994. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm.

Domestic Architecture in Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm, Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri. 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon. 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

FILMS

Suspicion
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3. 13 March, 6pm.

New German Film Series
Goethe Institute, 5 El-Bustan St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877.
Im Laufe Der Zeit (1976) directed by Wim Wenders. *13 March, 6.30pm.*
Die Macht Der Gefühle (1983) directed by A. Kluge. *18 March, 6.30pm.*

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
15 March, 7pm: La Notte, directed by M Antonioni (1960).
16 March, 7pm: Ultra, directed by R Tognazzi (1990).

Spanish Films
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 395 2326.
A Happy Sunday: *16 March, 7.30pm.*
Letters From The Park: *19 March, 7.30pm.*

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hallaq Housh
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hassan El-Loli
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman At The Top)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

A Time To Kill
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Ghost and The Darkness
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

Spy Hard
New Odeon II, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St. Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Cable Guy
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Moonlight and Valentino
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

One Fine Day
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9 30pm.

Fallen Angel
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Don Juan de Marco
New Odeon III, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St. Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Tin Cup
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Diabolique
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown, Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Maximum Risk
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Nutty Professor
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

MUSIC

Song Recital
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 18 Sidi El-Metwalli St, El-Attarin, Alexandria. Tel 03/484 0765. 13 March, 7pm.
A performance of Greek, Arab, English and Spanish songs.

National Arabic Music Ensemble and Cairo Opera Children's Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0589. 13 March, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 March, 8pm.
Ramy Yassa (piano), Hassan Sharara (violin), Mahmoud Osman (viola), Mohamed Hamdy (clarinet), Manal Mohieddin (harp) and Nevine Alloubа (soprano), conducted by Sherif Mohieddin, celebrate the orchestra's 5th anniversary.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra and Berlin Concert Choir
Main Hall, as above, 15 March, 8pm.
Music by Tchaikovsky and Brahms, with American pianist Daniel Pollack, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Youth and Children Conservatoire Choir & Egypt Children's Choir
Small Hall, as above. 14 & 16 March, 11am.
Conducted by Mohamed Ibrahim Abdellah.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, as above, 16 March, 8pm.
Performed by Marcelle Matta.

Concert of Chamber Works
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 16 March, 8pm.
Featuring the Piano Quartet in G minor by Mozart and The Von Grunigen Quartet by Tarek Ali Hassan.

Jazz Recital
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 17 March, 8pm.
A fusion Western and Eastern music performed by Yehia Khalil.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 18 March, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

THEATRE

Bahlool Fi Istambul (Bahlool In Istambul)
Ramsis Hilton Theatre, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Fri & Sun 8.30pm.

Hekmat Hanem...Alexa?
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 10pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 3444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm. Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

El-Gamzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm. Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8.30pm, Wed & Thur, 10pm.

LECTURES

Cairo: Memory and The City
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 13 March, 5.30pm.
Nicholas Warner.

Classical Papers No 4
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 6 March, 6pm.
Abdel-Moneim Talima and Ishaq Ebeid introduce newly published papers on classical studies

Droit, Culture et Société: Une Perspective Anthropologique
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 18 March, 5pm.
Lecture by Louis Assier-Andrieu, CNRS.

The Use and Abuse of History in both Western and Middle East Politics
Oriental Hall, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 17 March, 5pm.
Walid Qaziha, Michael Reimer and David Blanks.

Education and the Challenges of the 21st Century
Oriental Hall, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 18 March, 5pm.
Lecture by the president of Ain Shams University and Tarek Ali Hassan, Endocrinology professor at El-Azhar University.

All information correct at time of going to press. Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Makram Henein

ART critics exhibit their paintings, drawings and sculptures alongside other artists in the **Alexandria Cultural Palace.**

The Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation hosts a retrospective exhibition of works by **Makram Henein**: from a cubist phase, to an impressionist one, to a synthesis of both and, finally, to sketch-like drawings in black and white. Regardless of the formal phase, the works are always preoccupied with social issues.

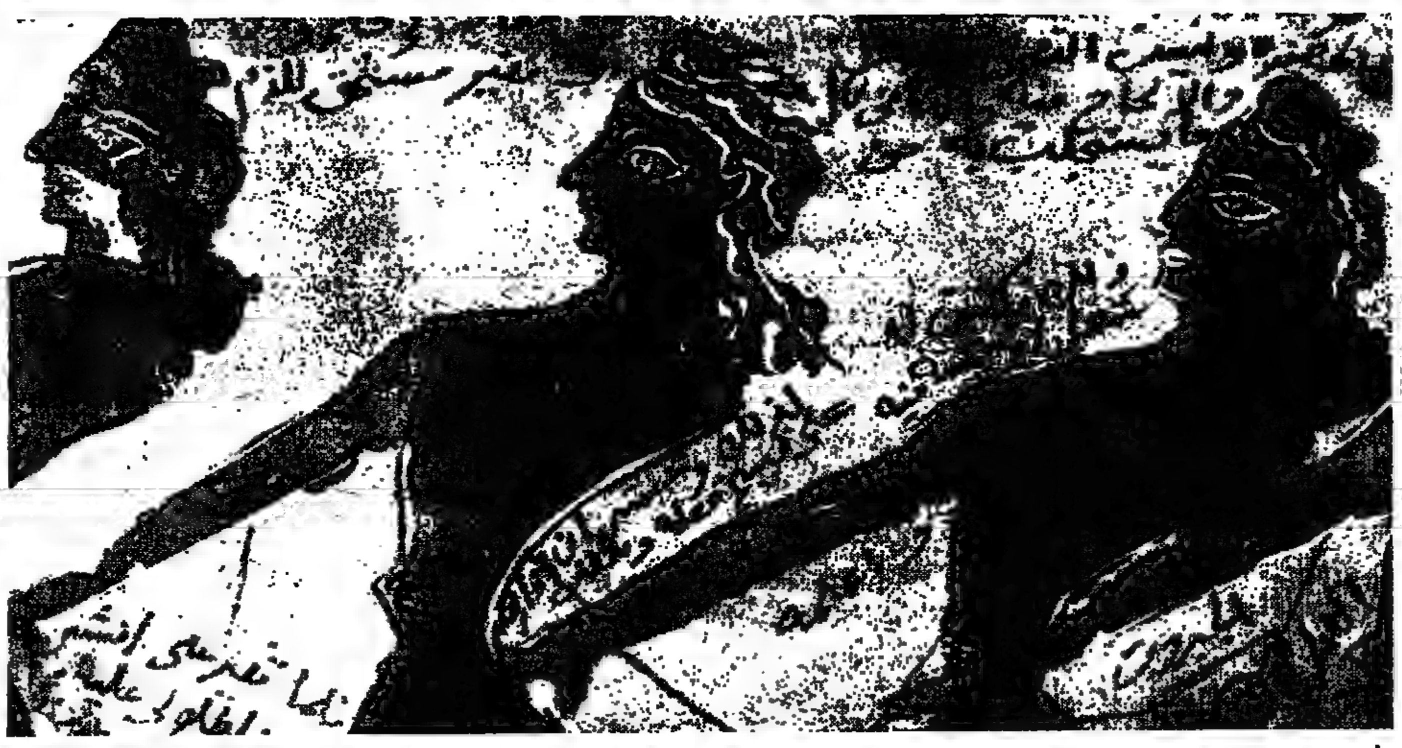
Paintings in pastels by **Mervat Rifaat** are on show at the **Hilton Ramsis**. Exhibited under the title 'Another Time, Another Place', these approach Bedouin life through the mist of nostalgia.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***

Dust and plaster roses

Nigel Ryan offers a brief guide to the plethora of exhibitions crowding Cairo's galleries













Top: Saleh Hassouna's Story of the Dog, a sad tale well-told; Huda Lutfi, from the exhibition Woman and Memory, at the Ewart Gallery, and above, Saleh Enani's cinematic seduction, The Bachelor Flat, a not quite blow-by-blow account of yet another lovers' tryst

Galleries appear to have entered one of their sporadic silly seasons when so much is happening that simply to keep up involves endless searching through listings pages and rushing across town from venue to venue. If Ramadan is a dry month, then the immediate post-Ramadan flurry of activity can come as something of a shock. And what is more, it looks set to continue until the onset of summer, when at least we are given a chance to pause, if only because it has suddenly become too hot to contemplate an endless gallery crawl.

So what is showing, and is it worth the effort?

Until 17 March the Ewart Gallery at the American University in Cairo is hosting works by one of its faculty members, Huda Lutfi, under the collective title Woman and Memory. This is, apparently, not her first exhibition, and the programme accompanying it notes earlier contributions to group shows in Marseilles and France.

The programme also contains a statement of intent, of sorts: "My awareness that women make only a fleeting appearance in the realm of the written historical word may explain why the feminine is so present in my symbolic imagery. Perhaps, through the realms of form and colour, I can tell more of her story."

The colours through which Huda Lutfi hopes to expose the invisible feminine are invariably muted — tasteful, at times a little washed out, these are archaeological tonalities. And the forms? Silhouettes, repeated across the picture surface like so many stencils, repeated, sometimes, across series of pictures. Or else they are cut out and pasted on, contained within complex frames that resemble miniaturised versions of lavish altar pieces.

With minimal variations the artist hopes to create discrete pieces of art. Coptic Magic Dolls, two storeys of kneeling figures, reappear — same figure, except that one arm is now outstretched, in The Lotus Touch.

This is a remarkably polite exhibition. It is also one that conceals little beneath the well-behaved surfaces. For whether these cut out and photocopied then over painted characters carry ankhs or crescents in their hands they are all the same. Moghul miniatures, or an angel in the centre of a labyrinth, it doesn't really matter. Small, tasteful, a kind of up-market art postcard, the best are decorative but never anything more.

One longs for a little life but it is not to be had. A possibility for such might have existed in the piece entitled Fayum Portraits. There are few pictures from any period that can effect so direct a link between subject and viewer as these remarkable coffin portraits. Unfortunately what we get is a schematised rendering of six women, again in miniature, all desperately well-behaved, bloodless and with no links at all to their purported models. Dry as dust. One leaves wanting fresh air and a hint, at least, of something less self-conscious.

Cinematica, an exhibition of Salah Enani's recent works at Duroob Gallery, possesses the virtue of showing little fear of colour. The fact is, though, that it is impossible to avoid a sense of déjà vu wandering around the exhibition.

These characters have been around for some time. The moon faced men and women who smooch into and out of one another's arms have formed the subject of Enani's painting for at least as long as I can remember. And though the exhibition is billed as recent works, there are at least two pieces included — Madame Suma, a potrait of a sagging drunk, a woman of a certain age, cigarette in hand, drink on table, and The Party, a pneumatic couple leaning across a white grand piano in a louche cocktail bar that looks as if it should be in prohibition Chicago — that featured in the same artist's exhibition at Al-Hanager last year. Madame Suma, incidentally, is one of very few among Enani's "portraits" that makes even an attempt to escape his usual archetyping.

But if Enani is recycling his old paintings, one need not be that surprised. His entire output constitutes a replay of the same situations, the same archetypes doing the same things in different places. That some of them should now be doing it on celluloid — the exhibition includes a painting of a couple, mid-embrace, called An Egyptian Film — merely returns these characters to their point of origin, for in the end you were always more likely to watch them on the screen than meet them in the street. Every shoe-shiner is not, after all, a worldly wise old man, every woman an amply endowed, curvaceous louche, happy to display her cleavage whether carrying a baby in a crowded bus or simply strolling along the pavement with her prominent jawed beau.

What has always surprised about Salah Enani is the sheer mileage he can get out of what is, after all, a very limited vein. What his painting records has never purported to even approximate to real life. It is a vein of nostalgia that has everything to do with the way life was presented on the cinema screen four or five decades ago, and it is obviously a nostalgia that appeals.

What is new in the current show is the attempt at narrative, most obvious in the series of paintings — framed, for those who miss the point, in a black wooden replica of the holes that edge film stock — given the title The Bachelor Flat. And what we are given is a not quite blow-by-blow account of a lover's tryst. Our heroine, if her expression — which runs that celebrated gamut of emotions, all the way from A to B — is anything to go by, never quite made it out of B movies. From entering the flat to final post-coital swoon she seems in constant need of smelling salts. But in the final frame the lamp on the bed-side table has been knocked to the floor, so we know that something happened.

For once, though — and maybe this is because I visited the exhibition after emerging from the Huda Lutfi show — I found Enani's work more appealing than usual. Everything is neon lit, and if they are all caricatures, they are unapologetically so. Acid greens, viridians, saturated yellows — here, at least, is colour, and an informed construction of the pictorial space, and in one amusing conceit, A Wedding Picture — the portrait of the happy couple in a painted, floral frame — a sense of humour.

The sense of déjà vu that lingers through Salah Enani's exhibition continues at the gallery on the ground floor of the British Council where the sculptor Gamal Abdel-Nasser is also exhibiting his most recent works.

Once again the subjects, and their treatments, are more or less familiar. And once again there are works that appear to have carried over from the artists last show — in the case of Abdel-Nasser his one man exhibition as Espace. At Espace, though, the plaster bracket pieces in question were displayed on the end of pedestals whereas now they are attached to the wall.

Gamal Abdel-Nasser has always taken bits of wire, plaster, objects found, cutlery — knives, forks, spoons — and made them into things. The results have at times been disturbing, though more often than not it is whimsy that triumphs. That and the occasional dirty joke. In the British Council gallery he has reassembled some of his more amusing characters — the wire woman with a rickety umbrella on a windy day, the cockerels that strut tirelessly, it would appear, through all his exhibitions, and added a few more. There is the insect woman with wings, torso articulated a little like a wasp, only with the addition of breasts. He genders violins — add a couple of bumps and the curves speak for themselves — and humanises chairs. Cover one in plaster and add eyes, nose and mouth into the bent wood back, sprinkle liberally in primary coloured house paint and what do you have? If not hey presto a person then at least something to make you look twice, though perhaps no more. And if a violin can be a body, then a telephone can become a head simply by wearing the mouthpiece at a jaunty angle. Forks are doubly useful, since they can be both arms and hands.

Once the point is made, though, and Gamal Abdel-Nasser has been making it for most of the present decade, it does not have that much further mileage. Seven years on the cockerels begin to look a little tired even if, in this exhibition, one of them manages to cross its legs and sit in a chair.

Still, there are newer things to peruse. In a corner of the gallery is a Statue of Liberty, a mottled plaster structure with spiky crown but with a scimitar, not a torch, held in the outstretched hand. Nor does Liberty appear to be holding up her sword in an act of self defence. It is an effective political cartoon, but one that need not be sculptural, and might indeed look better as pen and ink on paper. The devils, too, were quite fun, strange winged creatures with horns and tails, one dressed a little incongruously in what might have been leopard print lycra.

Sculpture has been busy on its own generic deconstruction ever since Rodin arrived on the scene. There is really very little left to be done. But what, one cannot help wondering, would Gamal Abdel-Nasser produce were he to abandon the materials he has been using for so long now — materials whose familiarity, however out of context they appear — and whose impermanence (plaster, after all, only needs a little water to revert to type), now operate as a kind of safety net?

The first floor exhibition hall of the Opera House Gallery is devoted to the work of four artists, Hassan El-Sharq, Sheikh Ramadan Abu Sweilam, Sayed Amin Fayed and Saleh Hassouna. And of all the exhibitions covered here this is the only one that shows any sign of actually having been curated; i.e. of having had the pictures selected, chosen rather than being accidentally thrown together simply because they happened to be lying around or there was another wall to fill.

The subjects are varied: from night club scenes to legends, from Abu Zeid El-Hilali to a cartoon life — and death — of a dog, the latter a particular effective pictorial narrative. The sources, too, are as varied: there are figures apparently based on Nigerian sculpture in the work of Hassan El-Sharq (the artist himself refers to them as "fantasias"), ambiguous, polymorphic creatures dredged from legend, deer like creatures with human heads, foliage that resolves itself into an open mouth in pieces by Saleh Hassouna, a vivid, unsentimental pastoral by Sheikh Ramadan Abu Sweilam.

There are, of course, any number of objections one might raise to the appellation naive art, the most significant being that in the end it does not really signify anything at all. But should you decide to embark, this week, on a trek around Cairo's ever expanding number of galleries, here is where you should aim to end up, for both a breath of fresh air, and an intimation of what art can do.

Favourites? Salah Hassouna's illustrations of Abu Zeid El-Hillali, slithery heroes, as sleek as they come, with chain mail garments worn like a reptilian carapace. The same artist's Story of the Dog, a kind of condensed comic strip narrative, held within a single frame, which, without stinting on necessary detail is an essay in the use of restraint to heighten effect. Hassouna's is the most elegant of minimalisms, allowing space for greater resonance.

The surface of Sayed Fayed's carefully modulated paintings is perhaps a little too oleaginous, but these mournful eyed fish and their human equivalents appear to be glimpsed through the thin light of dawn. Amphibious prototypes, despite the muted colouring, they remain uncomfortable, disturbing reminders of something older and not necessarily kind.

Plain Talk

I met a fascinating personality the other day. Gerard Benson, a leading contemporary British poet, has published 20 collections of his own — four of which contain children's poems.

Benson was in Cairo as a guest of the British Council for a number of reasons. He was a member of the jury to select the finalists in the poetry competition, an annual event for the recital and composition of poems organised for students in language schools. Benson was deeply impressed by the standard of our youngsters, and his only reservation was that they tend to gesticulate and use body language quite a lot. He is obviously not used to the Egyptian way of self-expression.

The second task was to oversee poetry workshops at the British Council. I asked him in my television programme, Open Forum, about the workshops' activities. Apparently, the workshops are for young up and coming poets to submit their compositions, have them examined, analysed and discussed by Gerard and then, perhaps, get them published.

Benson's third activity was to meet with Egyptian poets, both in Cairo and Alexandria, and discuss their works with, of course, readings of his own pieces. Incidentally, he is a great reader, and his vocal rendering of the poems is a proof that poetry should be vocal, not linear, heard and not read. Listening to poems is like listening to music; the emotional effect is heightened by a real understanding of the nuances of the poems.

Some people believe that writing prose or poetry for children, but especially poetry, is an easy task. According to Benson, however, addressing children is more difficult than addressing adults. In order to appeal to children, Benson thinks, the writer should put himself in a child's shoes, think like a child, and envisage what a child would like to read.

It is the introduction of children to poetry that makes them love the English language. The road to poetry is opened up to children by nursery rhymes, then Shakespeare's sonnets followed by other poets'. This is my little piece of advice I give to our educationalists who are grieving over the downward trend of pupils' knowledge of the Arabic language: poetry touches children's hearts and endears the language to them.

Benson believes that there is a revival of poetry. More poetry collections and anthologies are published and publishers are exhibiting an unusual keenness on publishing poems. Besides, some leading newspapers are publishing a poem a day, while a Poetry Day has been fixed.

Benson started an interesting project displaying poems in the underground stations. Selections were made of both classical and modern works, and the response was such that he and his collaborators decided to publish the displayed poems in book form. So far 200,000 copies have been sold.

A project started by Benson which I thought ingenious was Nemo's Almanac 1997. It is a literary competition which started in January and ends in December 1997. Its prizes are book tokens.

For every month of the year, six quotations taken from poems, novels and plays are given. The quotations are to be identified by reference to author, work and, where appropriate, line number, chapter, act or scene.

Looking through answers I found quotations by Pope, Melville, Hartley, Forster, Keats, Hardy, Eliot and others. Participants were expected to identify 72 quotations and the first three prizes were given to participants who scored full marks.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

City by the sea

Alexandria in Egypt: Ideas, New Writing, Images, edited by Kenneth Brown, Kenneth and Hannah Davis Taieb. Mediterraneans/Mediterraneennes 8/9. Texts in French and English

This thick special issue of *Mediterraneans/Mediterranéennes* constitutes a very rich offering indeed for Alexandreiaphiles: representative samples of more than 80 works, many of them hitherto unpublished, by poets, novelists, short-story writers, biographers, essayists, architects, painters, sculptors, and photographers, living and dead, all of them associated with Alexandria. The quality is extraordinarily high.

One or two pieces may have joined this party under false pretenses. The selection from Walter Armbrust's book on Egyptian popular culture, for example, is really about television, not Alexandria. And the American poet Mark Doty's third collection, published in 1995, though certainly called *My Alexandria*, is not about the city either. The title is in fact metaphoric, not literal. Doty's poetry, though profoundly indebted to Cavafy, is in no other way Alexandrian; and the city specifically referred to throughout the poem quoted in this collection is Boston, Massachusetts. The drawings David Hockney made of Alexandria in 1963, which are equally tributes to Cavafy and to Gamal Abdel-Nasser, would have been more clearly relevant.

It is highly appropriate, on the other hand, that this collection should be headed with an eloquent over-view by Edwar El-Kharrat, the most Alexandrian of Alexandrians, who examines a handful of literary forebears and contemporaries and attempts to define their relationships to the city he loves as he himself understands it. He is excellent on a couple of English writers and may be excused if he has trouble summoning up sympathy for Cavafy or overestimates the Alexandrianism of Ungaretti, who left the city in 1912 and revisited it again briefly only twice before his death in 1970.

Alexandria's submerged pre-Ptolemaic harbour, for instance, the famous "porto sepolto" that Ungaretti first learned about from the Thuile brothers, never signified for the poet anything particularly Alexandrian or even Egyptian. On the contrary, as he tells us himself, it symbolised the hidden persistence within his own psyche of the Italian culture from which his Egyptian birth might otherwise have cut him off. In *1914-1915*, the powerful poem he wrote in 1931 after his first return to Egypt, he bids a definitive farewell to Alexandria and "the melancholy delusion that you might be, stranger, the city of my birth," concluding with an encomium on his cultural homeland: "Chiara Italia, parlasti finalmenti/ Al figlio d'emigranti."

The passage from Ungaretti's *Egyptian Notebook* that appears later in this collection centres on the worlds of imagination opened for him by an old Montenegrine lady, by the city's great gardens and walled estates, and by the brothers Thuile in Maks.

Outstanding in this collection, to my taste, are prose pieces by Mohamed Awad (charming and instructive, as usual), Faris Shidyaq (1804-1887), Mohammed Hafez Ragab, Ungaretti, Harry Tzalas, Jack Debney, Ibrahim Abdel-Megid, Lucien Basch, Ragab Saad Al-Sayed, Amira Nowair, Jacques Hassoun, the interviews of Bernard de Zogheb by Hala Halim (first published on these pages), the interview of Mustafa Safouan by Kenneth Brown, and above all the selections from hitherto unpublished memoirs by Gaston Zananiri, the late and much lamented Wadida Wassef, and Robert Mabro, who is still happily very much with us.

Among the poems there is less success, Only Mark Doty's "Chanteuse" appears in its original language; and translation is a risky business. We are thus treated unnecessarily to two translations of the most over-quoted (in translation) literary work of our end of the twentieth century, Cavafy's *The God Abandons Antony*. (Cavafy himself preferred the English translation by John Valassopoulo, which was also the one used several times by E.M. Forster). More to the point would have been the magnificent six-line declaration *Ston idio khoro*, which is specifically alluded to by Doty. We should be grateful, on the other hand, for translations of Ahmed Fouad Negm (by Robert Mabro), Ahmed Mursi and Amal Donqol (by Frederic Legrange), Nasser Ferghaly (by the author and David Kuhn), and especially perhaps Abdel-Moneim Ramadan (by my esteemed colleague Ferial Ghazoul).

The omissions are numerous and many are surprising. The editors do not give us any poetry at all, for example, by Ungaretti. An early poem often subpoenaed to attest to Alexandrianism, *Il paesaggio di Alessandria d'Egitto*, is so third-rate that it was suppressed by Ungaretti himself for decades; and perhaps no one pointed out such splendid alternatives as *Fase*, *Primo Amore*, or even *Cera una volta*.

Another surprising omission is the Diwan group: Abd El-Rahman Shukri (1886-1958), Abbas Mahmud El-Aqqad (1889-1964) and Ibrahim Abdel-Qadir Mazini (1890-1949). Nor is there anything by Enrico Pea or Faustina Cialente. More understandable, on the other hand, is failure to include Marinetti, who saw his native Alexandria as a Futurist photo-opportunity located somewhere in the desert, or Lawrence Durrell, who saw it as a seaside suburb of Gomorra populated by monomorphic women, polymorphic men, and one or two mute darkies called "Arabs."

Among the reproductions of works of plastic art, we naturally miss colour, especially when it comes to the work of Mahmud Said or Abd El-Hadi El-Gazzar. But we also miss anything at all by the likes of Sasson, Sebasti, Richard, Terni, Scalet, Michels, Angelopoulo, Papageorge, Brandani, and Clea Badaro. And some of the captions are quite naive: Mahmud Said, we are told, for example, "was especially successful in putting down on canvas the grace and nobility of peasant women, their natural fresh beauty," when what we are looking at are obviously a pair of his typical and wonderful *banat al-bahr*. (Alexandrians: please be kind enough to explain this latter term to readers who come from the Outer Dark).

It might be noted that there are also a few incorrect transcriptions scattered throughout, inescapable perhaps when one is working, say, from French renditions of Arabic versions of Italian, English, or Greek. Such minor defects in no way diminish the value of this extraordinary gathering, which is shortly to be produced, one is told, in Arabic. There is no piece in it that is not well worth reading more than once or twice and many are worth saving.

Reviewed by **John Rodenbeck**

Al-Ahram

13 -19 March 1997

Apartments, churches, palaces, mosques: the designs of foreign architects working in Egypt from the mid-19th century receive a long overdue reevaluation. *Al-Ahram Weekly* reports



Building on sand

Who will save Egypt's modern architectural heritage? To this increasingly pressing question, architects, historians and restoration experts have sought to provide answers. The preservation campaign launched by *Al-Ahram Weekly* has met with an enthusiastic response, while last week, the conference hosted by the Italian Cultural Centre added fuel to the fire, as **Fayza Hassan** discovers

At a conference sponsored jointly by the IFAO (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale), the CEDEJ (Centre d'Etudes Economiques et Juridiques) and the Italian Cultural Institute, hosting the event, scholars of different specialisations met to discuss the work of the foreign architects who influenced 19th and 20th century architecture in Egypt and to discuss strategies which might salvage what remains.

During the three-day debate, European and Egyptian experts and interested amateurs underlined the architectural and cultural importance of the 19th and 20th centuries, and identified remaining buildings of historical importance which are about to disappear, because of neglect, abuse or developers' greed. The participants agreed that until now, the architecture of this period, often identified as "European" in Cairo and "cosmopolitan" in Alexandria, and including only palaces, administrative buildings and the dwellings of the bourgeoisie, have been considered as either alien to the true Egyptian tradition, and/or of little — if any — historical value.

The fact that this architectural oeuvre was carried out by foreign architects, building for the elite and for foreigners, may be one of the reasons why Egyptians have mixed feelings about this part of their heritage. In fact, the construction of "modern" Cairo concerned the Egyptians only marginally: "[We] can at least distinguish between those zones within the city where the traditional rhythms are maintained, despite the pressure of colonial materialism, and those which already betray another aspect, another sense of time. An Eastern city is built, not inwards from an encircling wall, or from a space to a centre, but from within. *In contrast to Western towns, it presents* or rather confronts the visitor with an elaborate labyrinth. The layout of the town repulsed the newcomer, but favoured the close intimacy of family life, expansion within-doors," writes Jacques Berque in *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution* (Faber & Faber, 1972). The principles ruling the geometrical alignment of buildings and roads in a Western city are in direct opposition to this description.

In time, however, the Egyptian elite was caught up in the drive towards modernisation and the need to participate actively in public life, according to Khaled Asfour, from King Faysal University in his paper "Reordering tradition: a design mentality", presented at the conference [see the extract published here].

It is customary to date the beginning of European influence on Egyptian architecture to the reign of Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) and his eagerness to launch his country on a course of rapid Westernisation. This course, however, was actually adopted half a century previously by Muhammad Ali.

Since the beginning of the 19th century, travellers and the members of the French Expedition had established a two-way path of communication between East and West. While Egypt longed for Western knowledge and expertise, Europe was seized with what soon became known as Egyptomania. *In 1805, Paris was already displaying several* "Egyptian"-style buildings such as the Maison Egyptienne on the Place du Caire and the Hôtel Beauharnais in Rue de Lille.

Muhammad Ali sent groups of scholars to Europe in a bid to ensure the continuity of his efforts at development, bolstered by the European experts to whom he resorted for assistance in his immediate concerns. The *wali* needed many skilled construction workers, engineers and architects to build the factories which were to make of Egypt an industrialised country. It is during this period that he asked Jomard (a member of the French scientific commission with the French Expedition with whom he had remained in touch after Napoleon's departure) to recommend an engineer capable of building one of his new factories, which, according to the Roman chemist Barri, then working for Muhammad Ali, could provide Egypt with 300,000 kilogrammes of potassium nitrate a year.

Jomard recommended Pascal Coste, who completed the factory in Badrashein in 1819, then proceeded to build a gunpowder factory on the island of Roda as well as 19 towers spanning the distance between Alexandria and the Citadel for the installation of a telegraph line.

More importantly, Coste was in charge of building the irrigation canals, among them the Mahmoudiya. Coste spent ten years in Egypt and had to leave because of ill-health. He had become imbued with an "orientalist" architectural style, however, which he later applied to his work in his native town of Marseille. Unfortunately, there remains nothing of his oeuvre in Cairo save the sketches published in Paris in 1839 in his *Architecture Arabe ou Monuments du Kaire, mesurés et dessinés de 1818 a 1825* ("Arab Architecture or Monuments of Cairo, Measured and Drawn from 1818 to 1825"), which can be seen at the Municipal Library in Marseille.

Like many of his predecessors, Muhammad Ali was affected by what Galila El-Qadi describes as a tendency to nomadism ("Le Caire à la Recherche d'un Centre", *Annales de Geographie*, 1995, Vol 16). After the departure of the French Expedition, the new ruler of Egypt moved his residence and his government to the quarters previously occupied by the French, Ezbekiya. Feeling insecure, however, he returned to the Citadel, taking his ministries of finance and interior with him. Soon he was on the move again, fleeing real or imaginary enemies, multiplying the number of his palaces around the city and taking in his wake numerous members of the ruling class who felt a need to build their princely dwellings in the vicinity of the seat of power.

Muhammad Ali's successor, Abbas I (1848-1854) followed in the Pasha's tradition, setting up his residence as well as his Janissaries' quarters in the desert of Abbassiya, east of Cairo. Said (1854-1863), on the other hand, implanted his military barracks and his Ministry of Defence westward, on the Nile banks, where he demolished the palace Muhammad Ali had built for his daughter Zeinab, replacing it with accommodations for his troops, while he himself took up residence in one of the palaces built by his ancestors, writes El-Qadi.

It is in this flurry of architectural activity that Ismail (1863-1879) came to power. His was the dream of ruling from a modern capital, the Paris of the Middle East. In the space between the old city, to the East, and the Nile, to the West, Ismail marked out the boundaries of his city, which included Ezbekiya and its environs. The Ezbekiya lake was drained, replaced by an English garden around which grew the beginning of a business centre, *flourishing* by 1874. Hotels, the stock exchange building, the mixed tribunals (built where the Walda Palace had once stood), banks, department stores, consulates and cafés, as well as the Opera House, rapidly sprouted around the area. The Abdin Palace was completed that same year.

It soon became obvious that Ismail needed architects for all his projects and they came flocking to Egypt from all over Europe, some attracted by the building of the Suez Canal and the development of its environs, others simply hoping to get a commission. "The cost of engineering works in Ismail's reign reached 26,264,000 Egyptian pounds, which at that time was equivalent to about three billion French francs," writes Tarek Sakr in *Early Twentieth Century Islamic Architecture in Cairo* (American University in Cairo Press, 1992).

During those years, French, Italian, German, Austrian, Hungarian and Greek architects arrived in Cairo in droves. Some left a mark which remains to this day; others were not so lucky. Others still, like Ambroise Baudry (1838-1906), had been forgotten for a long time, often ignored by their own country, as a sort of punishment for having chosen Egyptian careers; Baudry has been "rediscovered" recently, said Mercedes Volait, from the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS/URBAMA, Tours), in her paper entitled *"L'Oeuvre Egyptienne d'Ambroise Baudry"*. Today, Baudry can finally be credited with his important contribution to Egyptian modern architecture.

In 1863, Khedive Ismail engaged the services of the German architect Julius Frantz to design the Gezira Palace, with De Curel Del Rosso, the designer of the Abdin Palace, as assistant, writes Sakr. The annexe to the palace as well as the wrought iron work was completed by Carl von Diebitsch, another German architect, said Rudolf Agstner, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, in his paper "Dream and Reality, Austrian Architects in Egypt 1869-1914", presented at the conference. It is possible that several architects worked together or in succession on this palace, as on many others. Diebitsch was decorating the interior of the Ismailia Palace when he died on 15 June 1869, said Agstner. An Austrian architect, Frantisek (Franz) Schmorantz, was to complete the palace just in time for the Suez Canal festivities.

It is not known which other buildings Schmorantz designed in Egypt, but he has remained famous for building an Egyptian palace for the Vienna 1873 World Fair, described in the official book on the World Exhibition: "He [Schmorantz] wanted to give an impression of the traditional way of construction and decoration which had survived in many buildings in Cairo, and yet had fallen into oblivion. So it happened that parts were taken from existing mosques, like minarets and cupolas, and were combined with the Egyptian palace. Elements also came from public baths, and were incorporated into the building. As a result, we see a palace-like building, whose interior mixes old and new, antique original Arabic and modern Egyptian elements, originals and copies."

Ismail's dreams of grandeur were never to become reality; on the eve of the colonial epoch, Cairo presented a strange face: on one hand the new city, a vast, unfinished construction site and, on the other, the old quarters, afflicted by poverty, time and the decadence of taste, which produced shocking contrasts.

Ali Mubarak, observing the city from the minaret of the mosque built by Amr Ibn Al-Aas, reflected with melancholy on the ancient city of the Arabs, "whose power, wealth and glory spread over the earth," writes Berque. "Nothing remains of its marvellous palaces, destroyed by the weather and the vicissitudes of passing time, which have utterly demolished it, obliterating every trace... It would be over-optimistic to distinguish between old and new districts. For even that which has been preserved is affected, directly or indirectly, by innovation. Where the relics of the past still stand, they are degraded. Moreover, Egypt's dynastic rulers treated the old sanctuaries with a misplaced zeal which often disfigured them," wrote Mubarak in the *Khitat*. Buildings in Cairo and Alexandria continued to sprout after Ismail's debacle.

In 1882, the Austrian Antoine Lasciac arrived in Egypt. He is credited for having designed the "Galerie Menasce on Midan Tahrir in Alexandria, as well as an ensemble of buildings in Sherif Street. In Cairo, he designed the building of the Club des Princes in Emadeddin Street, Zaafaran Palace, which was used by Sultan Hussein Kamel as his residence between 1915 and 1917, the Khedivial buildings in Emadeddin Street and the Coptic Church of Apostles Peter and Paul (El-Botrossiya)," said Agstner in his paper. Lasciac also built Banque Misr, today threatened by privatisation.

Between 1870 and 1900, the newly developed quarters were provided with an infrastructure. Public transport started operating regularly. The turn of the century marked the beginning of a new flurry of urbanisation projects. Garden City was developed, becoming the centre of diplomatic missions and a favourite location for the villas and small apartment blocks of the elite. The Khalig (the canal flooded in July every year, when the dam was broken and the Nile overflowed its banks) was replaced by a tramway line, and in 1904 Ernest Jaspar presented the Baron Empain with the plans for his new city, Heliopolis. By 1906, the new suburb of Maadi was in the making.

The city centre had moved. In 1922, Abdin Palace became the heart of Egyptian political life. As ancient palaces were razed and replaced by banks and administrative buildings, foreigners and affluent Egyptians moved their residences to the new, fashionable quarters, abandoning the old to the less fortunate.

"By 1952, several centres had developed in the city: the centre of power around Abdin Palace, the ministries and embassies along Qasr El-Aini Street and Qasr El-Doubara; the business centre in the area around Ismailiya Square; and the touristic and amusement centre around Ezbekiya," writes El-Qadi.

Meanwhile, Egyptian architects had started appearing on building sites. "The institutionalisation of architectural studies in Egypt had begun in 1886, four years after the British occupation. A new polytechnical school was established, with, for the first time, a specialised section for architecture," according to *Doris Behrens-Abou Seif*, in her paper, "An Italian architect in Cairo, a Portrait of Vittorio del Burgo".

Behrens-Abou Seif notes: "This school was reorganised in 1925 by a commission of experts from the Technical University of Zurich (*Eidgeossische Technische Hochschule*). The teaching personnel was Swiss and, until 1937, the school's administration was also in Swiss hands. It took a while, however, for architecture to acquire prestige among Egyptians. Preference was given to other polytechnical disciplines."

Between 1926 and 1946, said Abou Seif, only 50 students graduated from the school each year. In the late '40s, new schools of architecture were established and interest increased. *The School of Fine Arts*, founded as a private institution, was upgraded in 1928 and its diploma raised to the level of that granted by the polytechnical school. In 1935 the first delegation was sent to an international congress of architects and in 1946 the Architects' Syndicate was founded.

Egyptian engineers and architects who aspired to an administrative career in public service or a teaching position were required to complete their education in England — preferably — or the US or France. Until 1940 Egyptians could only work as assistants; professors had to be Swiss or British. On the other hand, on their return from abroad, aspirant architects could hope for a *government post in which they had the opportunity* to rise to high administrative positions, said Abou Seif. The indigenous educational institutions were nevertheless credited with graduating only one tenth of the architects practicing in 1927 and one third by 1947.

A great number of European professional builders were not qualified architects, however. According to Italian architect Vittorio del Burgo, most of the Italians who worked in Egypt as architects during this period were actually poor masons who had come from Sicily, started as apprentices and ended up as contractors. Italians were strongly represented among the builders of modern Cairo, according to Abou Seif: Alfonso Manescalo, who designed the Islamic Museum in Cairo in 1903-1904, and Mario Rossi, the chief architect of the Ministry of *Awqaf* until 1950 and who designed a large number of modern mosques, are only two examples among many.

Until 1952, European contractors were entrusted with all the large building projects carried out in Egypt, said Abou Seif. The Italian company Di Farro secured the contract to build the Aswan Dam at the beginning of the century, to consolidate the temples at Philae and Karnak, build royal palaces, churches, European schools, the National Bank of Egypt and the Agricultural Bank. Dentamarro and Cartareggia were another Italian company specialising in the building of bridges and roads. They constructed the corniche of Alexandria and laid out its beaches. Giuseppe Nistri was the most prominent interior decorator of the 1930s. His family enterprise was founded in 1830 in Pisa. Giuseppe himself arrived in Cairo around 1900 and specialised in Islamicate interior decoration, said Abou Seif.

Whereas the period between 1930 and 1950 was dominated by European or Levantine contractors employing European architects, following World War II the situation began to change gradually. Once the Syndicate was founded, it became necessary for architects to possess an academic degree in order to exercise their profession. This opened up new opportunities for degree-holding Egyptian architects and marked the end of European hegemony over architecture and engineering in Egypt.

In 1939 the magazine *Al-Emara*, specialising in architecture, was established. It became a forum for academic discussions on architecture, urbanism and the problems faced by Egyptian architects. With the 1952 Revolution, Egyptian architects took over the building industry.

The city centre as we know it today was *in very large part designed and built by foreign* architects whose memory is quickly fading as their creations are demolished one after the other by over-eager developers, encouraged by owners who have seen the price of land soar to unprecedented heights while rents remain controlled. Neither historical nor artistic value can face the bulldozers of the various financial interests *involved and the* unprecedented growth of a population in dire need of basic living and commercial space.

The question is: what, if anything, can be preserved of the remaining buildings in the long run? As Mercedes Volait pleads: if the buildings have to go, could we not at least obtain detailed documentation of what was once the pride of the Egyptian elite?

Records are few and far between, many lost, others maybe misplaced by the few administrations still concerned with preserving their archives.

During the conference, Federico Pochini, Sylvia de Gasperis and Donato Lorusso of the Italian Cultural Centre in Cairo presented a project for the establishment of a data bank on foreign architecture in Egypt, an instrument which will enable future historians to study the death certificates of buildings which once made up Egypt's 19th and 20th century architectural heritage.

On a more optimistic note, historian André Raymond advocates a self-help system whereby the occupants of historically or architecturally remarkable buildings could take charge of financing and supervising the repairs and maintenance of their premises. Awareness, he says, is the first step to corrective action.

"The layout of the town repulsed the newcomer but favoured the close intimacy of family life"

Reordering tradition

Extract from the paper "Reordering Tradition: A Design Mentality", presented by Khaled Asfour

At the turn of the century, the idea of reordering tradition had different meanings to various people. One understanding was adopted by the director of the Committee of Conservation of Monuments of Arab Arts in Cairo, Antonio Patricolo. This was clear in a house of his design near the Cairo Citadel.

The plan is composed of two sections, laid out *in different directions.* The first, parallel to the street, is composed of two rooms with a separate entrance and had the function of receiving male visitors who were not to see the women of the house. The second, at an angle to the street, had a central hall surrounded by rooms, representing a European dwelling model. It was the place for receiving family friends.

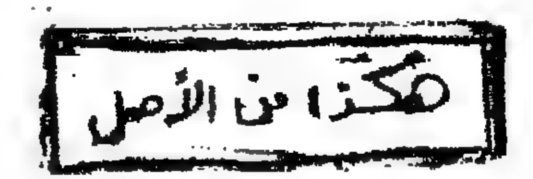
In this manner, *Patricolo chose* consciously to shift the axis of the men's reception from the rest of the house, thereby giving it a separate identity. By so doing, he wanted to give the message that this section was both added to the European model and acceptable in the Egyptian setting, since the client wanted to preserve a social tradition related to privacy but also desired a European form of dwelling. Tension was thus generated in the plan, reflecting a real-life situation: a rupture in society awakened by the massive influx of foreign ideas, a rupture that had caused endless debates *among social reformers* in Cairo.

The concept of reordering tradition here is alive, captures a conscious moment in history, and highlights the essence of a living culture that has both tradition and aspirations for the new. History in this case is "contemporary", the past existing in present cognition. It is respected; it is not frozen but, rather, interactive and alive. Its modification — but not its murder — is, hence, legitimate.

To kill tradition is to use forms hollowed from content. In Patricolo's house, forms had meanings. In the upper floor the *mashrabiya* screens were used to signify the presence of family quarters, as in the past. Yet the new *mashrabiya* was not typical on three openings. The lower portion had shutters placed at an angle, facing the sky. In this manner, the woman could open the shutters to admit sun and air — to satisfy modern hygiene — without being seen from the street below.

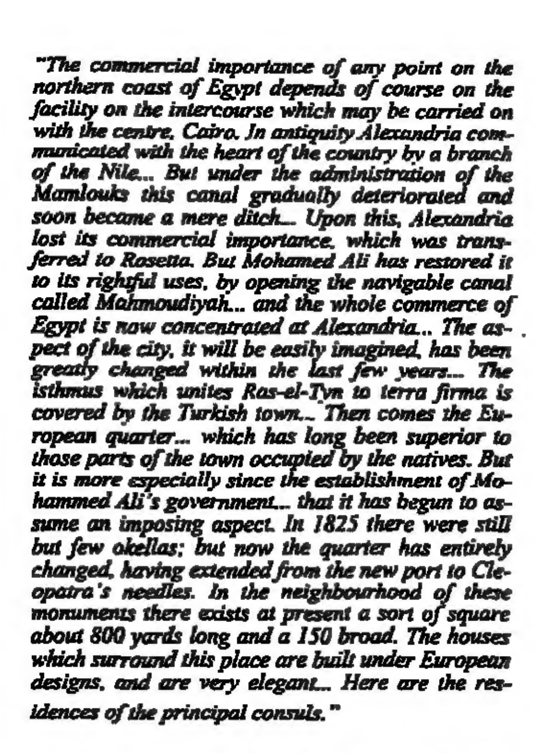
The facade on the *ground floor had a large* arched opening reminiscent of the loggia [*maq'ad*] found in traditional houses. In the original setting, this loggia was often a reception hall for male visitors, used during warm weather. In the new setting, it was still meaningful, for it was placed in the men's reception area. The difference between the old and the new loggias is that the former overlooked a courtyard, while the latter overlooked a street. The difference reflected one generation's restricted perception of privacy, entrenched in tradition, to that, looser and more *flexible*, of another already exposed to foreign ideas.

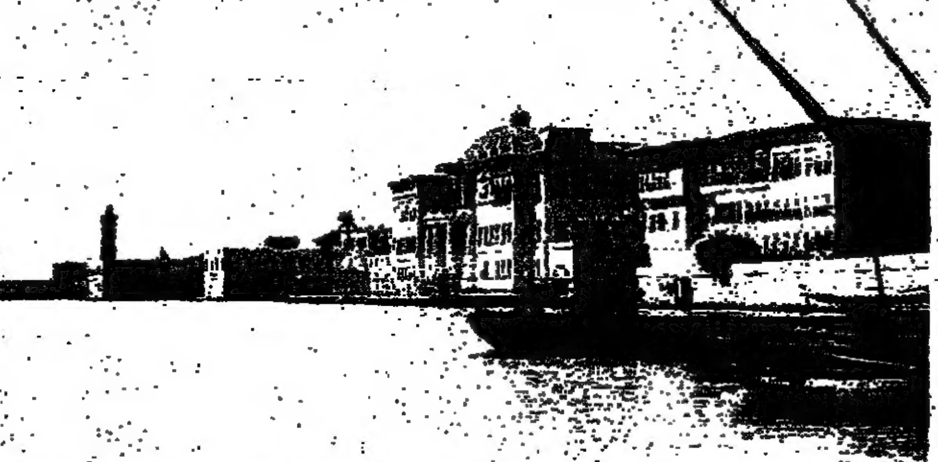
Patricolo's façade thus interacted with the programme of the building. The traditional vocabulary is no longer just decoration pleasing to the eye. It was not there just to invoke local character. It was not an image of dead tradition, but a living experience of the moment.



"The commercial importance of any point on the northern coast of Egypt depends of course on the facility on the intercourse which may be carried on with the centre, Cairo. In antiquity Alexandria communicated with the heart of the country by a branch of the Nile... But under the administration of the Mamlouks this canal gradually deteriorated and soon became a mere ditch... Upon this, Alexandria lost its commercial importance, which was transferred to Rosetta. But Mohamed Ali has restored it to its rightful uses, by opening the navigable canal called Mahmoudiyah... and the whole commerce of Egypt is now concentrated at Alexandria... The aspect of the city, it will be easily imagined, has been greatly changed within the last few years... The isthmus which unites Ras-el-Tyn to terra firma is covered by the Turkish town... Then comes the European quarter... which has long been superior to those parts of the town occupied by the natives. But it is more especially since the establishment of Mohammed Ali's government... that it has begun to assume an imposing aspect. In 1825 there were still but few okellas; but now the quarter has entirely changed, having extended from the new port to Cleopatra's needles. In the neighbourhood of these monuments there exists at present a sort of square about 800 yards long and a 150 broad. The houses which surround this place are built under European designs, and are very elegant... Here are the residences of the principal consuls."

From: *Egypt and Nubia, Their Scenery and Their People* by J A St John. London: Chapman and Hall







Ras El-Tin Palace, above, and right, the equestrian statue of Muhammad Ali, commissioned from Alfred Jacquemart, with a pedestal designed by Ambroise Baudry

The fruits of commerce

Hala Halim examines the architectural heritage to which Alexandria became heir when, in the mid-19th century, the city reasserted its commercial pre-eminence

As seen in St John's eye-witness account, it was thanks to the measures taken by Muhammad Ali that Alexandria, which before his reign had dwindled into a mere backwater, regained its commercial and political significance, with the digging of the Mahmoudiyya Canal, the development of the Western Harbour and the establishment of the arsenal, among other things. Over the following century the modern city expanded rapidly. The architectural styles that came to be represented in Alexandria and the contribution of foreign communities to the urban development of the city were among the topics addressed at the recent conference co-sponsored by the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo.

In a paper entitled "The Italianisation of Alexandria: An Analogy of Practice", Mohamed Awad and Cristina Pallini proceeded to demonstrate that "the Italian presence [in Alexandria] was dominant and its impact in so far as the development of its built environment could be justifiably described as hegemonic." Awad and Pallini divided the Italian contribution — from the early 19th century to the end of the cosmopolitan experience with the Nasser regime — into three phases which they analysed through case studies of representative architects from the community.

During the reign of Muhammad Ali (1807-1848), such Italian professionals as Francesco Mancini and Pietro Avoscani "began their careers promoting the Vice Regal family's own private developments". It was as chief engineer in the Ornato, "the first planning commission in the city and in Egypt", that Mancini made his mark. His main contribution was the development of "the European Centre", around the square in Manshieh which bore a succession of names: "Place d'Armes", later "Place des Consuls", then "Place Muhammad Ali" and, finally "Midan El-Tahrir".

In keeping with the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of the city, Mancini's concept of the square was eclectic. Borrowing the typology of the Okelle from the Turkish Town, he adapted it within a neo-classical language "to house in it the consuls, hotels (such as the Hotel d'Europe), the first theatre, cafés... etc." With its fountain, its tree-lined promenade, the square was "symbolic of an European way of life, attracting such functions as military parades, theatre and café concerts..." In the second half of the 19th century, the square would acquire its distinguishing landmark still extant today, namely the equestrian statue of Muhammad Ali, for which Alfred Jacquemart was commissioned. The latter recommended Ambroise Baudry to design the pedestal for the statue which was to mark the beginning of Baudry's involvement in Egypt, as explained in the paper read by Mercedes Volait, "L'oeuvre égyptienne d'Ambroise Baudry (1838-1906)".

Also within this first phase which ended with the British Bombardment of Alexandria in 1882, Awad and Pallini highlighted the contributions of Italian artist Pietro Avoscani whose tutelage at the hands of a goldsmith, a fresco painter and a decorator and wide travels left distinct influences on his particular brand of eclecticism. Among his many contributions was the decoration of the portico entrance to Ras El-Tin Palace, where he placed sculptures reminiscent of "those of the Senate and Synod building in St Petersburg, a city Avoscani had visited." Likewise, his design for the long-gone Zizinia Theatre (1863) copies the vestibule and proportioning of the façade of the Teatro Alla Scala.

With the British bombardment of Alexandria (1882) great portions of downtown Alexandria, including much of Mancini's work in the Place Muhammad Ali, were destroyed. The process of rebuilding heralded the second phase of Italian architectural contribution to the city, a phase which continued up to the First World War. At this stage the urban centre underwent a process of "degentrification", and the re-built Place Muhammad Ali witnessed the "institutionalisation of public functions... with such edifices as the Bourse, the Mixed Tribunals, banks... etc", while other buildings bore witness to "the continual commercial presence" in the square.

One such commercial building, the Galleria Menasce, was designed by the Italian architect Antonio Lasciac who was largely responsible for re-building the European centre. Another building designed by Lasciac is the *palazzina* Aghion (1887) — present-day headquarters of *Al-Ahram* in Alexandria — which the two researchers describe as "a sculpture, a homage to the oldest intersection in the city: the Soma and the Canopic Road." Lasciac also participated in the competition for the building of Alexandria's central railway station, the Cairo Station, and went on to collaborate with the Greek architect Iconomopoulos on the building. Here, "his vocabulary draws from the Renaissance and Art-Nouveau, using motifs like the sphinx head, maybe to represent the local context."

As to Giacomo Alessandro Loria, he "started his professional career in the Alexandria Municipality as a draftsman" and was very active during the inter-war period, when "the contribution of Italians remained high... though certainly not any more monopolistic." His public buildings drew on both Neo-Romanico (in the case of Italian institutions) and Neo-Renaissance (for other communities) forms. In his residential buildings overlooking Ramleh Station, as well as in the design of the Cecil Hotel, Loria "invent[s] details such as the use of coloured brickwork [and] mosaics and borrow[s] others such as Venetian Gothic details from the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. In [so] doing, Loria interacts with his urban space and invents his own interpretation of Italy."

The conclusion reached by Awad and Pallini, that "the reinterpretation of Italy in Alexandria was not... a projected aim... [but] came as a result of the interaction of individual tendencies and professional approaches in their respective environments" places the Italian contribution in sharp contrast to the ideological and aesthetic affiliations that bound Greek architects in Alexandria with Athens. This became evident in the two papers on Alexandrian Greek architects and architecture, by Alexandra Yerolimpos and Vassilis Colonnas. Their reports were the fruit of a research programme, undertaken by the University of Thessaloniki and directed by Yerolimpos and Colonnas, covering 19th and 20th century Greek architects and architecture in four East-Mediterranean cities: Istanbul, Smyrna, Alexandria and Cairo.

According to Colonnas, the Greek community, in an effort "to affirm its presence in a cosmopolitan city", built its edifices under the influence of neo-hellenic architecture which, in that period, would recognise no other style than neo-classicism. The neo-classical vocabulary "testifies to the artistic and ideological links between the community and the metropolis, Athens, [and is there] to demarcate [the community] from the eclectic style adopted in the public monuments [of Alexandria] or those styles adopted by other communities of the city." This was manifest in the different "islands", to use Yerolimpos' expression, of Greek community buildings, in Attarine, downtown and in Chatby.

The façade of the Evangelismos Cathedral (which dates back to 1854) was restored in more or less neo-classical style in 1868, later, in 1926, to be done up again in neo-baroque style. Meanwhile, and also in Attarine, in 1893, the community built the Tossitsa School for Girls also in neo-classical style "in contrast to the latter, neo-baroque stage of the Cathedral", comments Colonnas. In the inter-war period, continues Colonnas, neo-classicism gave way to more fashionable styles, including "a latter-day eclecticism with Neo-Renaissance tendencies and Byzantine echoes as well as contemporary tendencies such as Art Deco and the Modernist movement". Thus, the Salvago Theatre, in Chatby, "adopts a neo-classicism charged with a certain monumentality, but the interior is typified by a stylised modernism according to Art Deco".

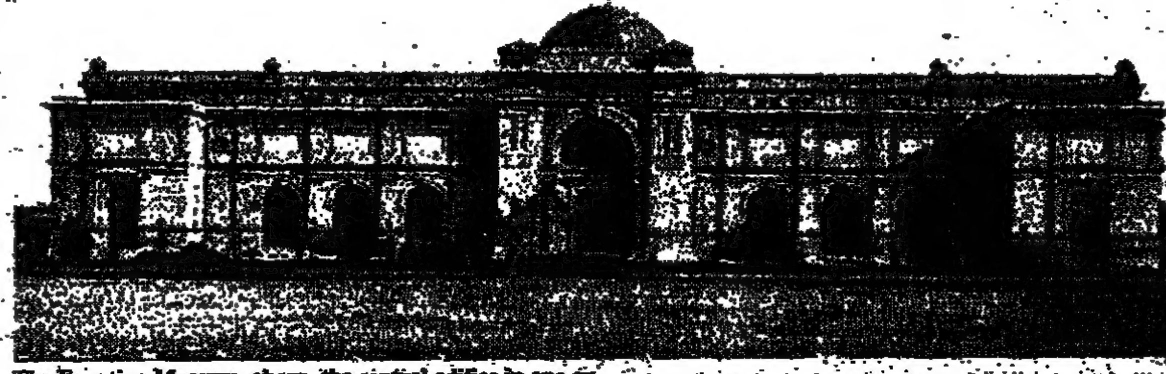
As to the private sector buildings owned by Greeks and their residences, the dominant style was eclecticism — "the international style of the 19th century", in Colonnas' words. The congregation of private Greek residences in the Quartier Grec, which dates back to about 1910, indicated that "the desire to show-off was one of their main concerns. Architecture in this case is a means to differ, to show superiority". Wrapping up his talk, Colonnas drew attention to the many 1920s and '30s buildings along the Corniche, designed by Alexandrian Greeks, "which represent a golden era of Art Deco architecture" and that are in dire need of conservation. The many threats posed to Alexandria's built environment and the need for concerted efforts to safeguard it formed the focus of another paper by Mohamed Awad, head of the Alexandria Preservation Trust. His report of the degradation and laisser aller of contemporary Alexandria was set off by Nicholas Warner's paper read in the same session, on the Charles Goad Fire Insurance Plans for Cairo and Alexandria in the first decade of this century.

Made for the purpose of providing "insurance underwriters with an up to date picture of the physical characteristics of cities and urban land use", the Goad Fire Insurance Plans of Cairo and Alexandria were published in 1905. Thoroughly detailed, the Cairo and Alexandria plans are invaluable to researchers in that they "provide... an unparalleled view of the economic and physical character of the two most important cities in Egypt at the time." Given that the Goad Plans were updated depending on "the speed of the development of the city and its commercial fortunes, and the level of interest among insurers for the market the city offered", it is interesting to note that of the two Egyptian cities covered by the project, only Alexandria had its map updated in April 1910, reaffirming that "the period between 1905 and 1910 were obviously boom years for Alexandria."

Known for his many campaigns for the preservation of Alexandria's architectural and urban heritage (among them the lawsuit launched in cooperation with the Friends of the Environment Association which successfully halted the annexation of a side-street for the purposes of extensions by the World Health Organisation), Mohamed Awad is indeed in a position to tackle the complex issues at stake in the conservation of the city's built environment. Awad began by reiterating the general point he has previously made that insufficient attention is paid to "the cosmopolitan heritage of the 19th and 20th century often described as 'The Colonial Heritage'".

Moving on to specific problems of conservation, Awad categorised these as "those that are caused by and linked to the natural environment" and "those which are man-made". As examples of the first, Awad showed slides of the Hellenistic Anfushi Tombs inundated with underground water and commented on government efforts to address the problem. As to the latter, Awad cited the dumping of concrete blocks some years ago into the underwater Pharos site off Qait Bey Fort, which has been stopped while the area is excavated.

. Expressing the reservation that it is not his "intention to prescribe solutions or present a magic-formula", Awad presented a few recommendations, including revised legislation and upgraded, environment consciousness-raising curricula.



The Egyptian Museum, above, the central edifice in one exhibition and a view, right, of Midan Mustafa Kamal as it might have been



Postcards from the past

The exhibitions organised by the Italian Cultural Centre pointed not only to what was but to what might have been. **Nigel Ryan** on the pictorial records of a city scape that refuses to be fixed

The various exhibitions of plans, perspective drawings and photographs organised by the Italian Cultural Institute to accompany the colloquium *Un Siècle d'architecture savante en Egypte* were, perhaps, a little less disheartening than the event itself. Sepia tinted photographs do, after all, constitute a kind of vacuum packed, ready made nostalgia. You expect things to have changed since the box camera clicked and the image emerged, and because of such expectations these photographs seemed somehow less dispiriting than the slides projected by so many of the speakers at the three day event, accompanied, with depressing regularity, by notices of recent or imminent destruction.

"Demolished in 1992."

"Under demolition."

"Facade restored by the Ministry of Education in 1994."

(This latter is merely a polite euphemism for as savage a redrawing of a building as can be imagined.)

The simple fact is, of course, that sequestered villas do not make ideal school buildings, that the Ministry of Education quite patently lacks the resources to sympathetically convert them into such even if the conversion were a theoretical possibility and as a consequence an alarmingly large number of once impressive structures are now in such a parlous state of disrepair as to be beyond salvation.

The domestic architectural preferences of the haute bourgeoisie during the reign of Abbas I could not be those favoured by modern educationists, the result being that everything gets lost in the gap — both the original structure and, given the iron-clad rules of economy — the better learning environment. And the groans that the projected slides of crumbling exteriors and dilapidated interiors elicited from the audience at this gathering devoted to architecture might just as well have been in sympathy with those who are supposedly schooled within such an environment.

Yet it is not just the grander outreaches of domestic architecture that have suffered the attrition of time, that have withered beneath the pressures to which Cairo, Egypt's urban heart, has been subjected. The photographic exhibition "Les demeures de la petite et le moyenne bourgeoisie au Caire de 1850 à 1950" neatly illustrated the point made by Khaled Asfour, from the University of King Faisal, Damman, in his lecture "Re-ordering Traditions: A Design Mentality" — traditional design features, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, rapidly became, within a Cairene context, little more than a bespoke outfit, a set of stylised motifs in which to dress the body of the building.

That this particular lecture should have been prefaced by a lengthy quotation from Ali Mubarak, among so many other things a rhetorician whose extolling of the virtues of hygiene served as metaphor for the ambitions of Egypt's rulers intent on orchestrating the birth of a modern nation state — Ismail's insistence that Egypt be a southern Mediterranean offshoot of Europe is in many ways the legitimate offspring of Muhammad Ali's programme of modernisation — should not blind us to the continued implications of the metaphor. The aim, after all, was not just to bring fresh air to the population of Cairo, and the result was certainly more than to make of *mashrabiyya* nothing but an ornamental extra.

By 1850 the kind of housing being constructed for Cairo's lower and middle classes was already undergoing a radical transformation. The process had, naturally, started earlier, during the reign of Muhammad Ali, though it would take some time for the kind of Rococo influences that had made themselves felt in Turkey throughout the 18th century to filter down to the lower levels of Cairene architecture. The exhibited selection of photographs drawn from the collection of Ahmed Abdel-Gawad, however, illustrates that by 1850 the process was well under way as swags of stucco foliage extended across the facades of relatively modest buildings, aping the tastes and predilections of the city's Turkish ascendancy.

The massive and far reaching civil works undertaken during the reign of Ismail facilitated an exodus from the old Islamic hub of the city to newer locations. And in building on new plots, for a newly emerging class, a reappraisal of traditional forms will almost inevitably take place. At this moment of transition it is hardly surprising that a superimposed Rococo ornamentation should co-exist with seemingly more traditional forms — with a cannibalisation of the outward trappings of traditional patterns and mores, and their reassertion as decorative motif.

Given the stresses to which the urban and social fabric of the city was being subjected the emergence of a full blown neo-Islamic style might be considered something of a foregone conclusion. Such a development was encouraged by the number of European architects at work in Egypt, architects trained in a period when revivalism, of this, that, or the other, had become the hallmark of their profession. In the absence of viable prototypes they were left with little option but to apply Islamic inspired surface decoration to buildings whose functions could not, organically at least, be related to those buildings that had actually emerged from the tradition that had given rise to the decorative elements they were co-opting. (The traffic, as might be expected, was two way: just think of the gothic tracery windows of the Mosque of El-Hussein.)

The fact remains, though, that speculative developments needed to hold attractions for the particular income groups they were targetting. And if the lack of concordance between function and outward form that has led many to decry neo-Islamic architecture as no more than an inelegant and unjustifiable hybrid cannot be contained within the perimetres of a modernist formalism, the prevalence and popularity of the style, both among the customers for lavish villas and more modest units within apartment blocks testifies to the fact that the style held specific attractions at a particular moment, and, indeed, continues to hold such attractions.

In the half century between the end of the rule of Muhammad Ali and 1897, the population of Cairo had doubled. The ambitious redesigns of the city, the traumas of which are best exemplified by the cutting of Muhammad Ali Street through an already existing and populous quarter rather than by new developments outside the existing city limits, constituted a dizzyingly ambitious piece of social engineering. That at such a moment a purely non-functional form of decoration, aping traditional, older forms, should have emerged, and have been welcomed, at least in part for its reassurance, should come as no surprise.

The exhibitions organised by the Italian Cultural Centre did not, however, focus exclusively on the domestic. Public buildings were also included, and none more prominently than the Egyptian Museum, central edifice in the exhibition "La construction du Musée égyptien: album photographique de la Société Garozzo et Zaffarani". And on some levels the museum, enlightenment space par excellence, shares an important feature with more modest, domestic, speculative designs. It too is built to house, and to order, though its particular inhabitants are the remnants of a far more ancient urbanism.

The chequered history of attempts to establish a museum to house the artefacts of Ancient Egypt is well-documented. The one surprising fact about the building that was eventually constructed to the north of present day Midan Tahrir is that it should not have emerged in its present form at all. Alternatives existed galore, not least a remarkable domed structure, an illustration of which was included in the presentation given by Rudolf Agstner, "Dream and Reality: Austrian architects in Egypt (1869-1914)". What finally emerged though, was the faintly pompous, provincial town hall we see today, replete with its pharaonic bas reliefs, an Egyptomaniac cannibalising of the real things inside.

But the Egyptian Museum, with its taxonomic imperatives, was never going to provide as rich a source for readings of the tensions between function and form as domestic constructions.

Also included in the exhibitions were documentation of the work of Mario Rossi, the Italian architect who, during his tenure of employ at the Ministry of *Awqaf* undertook a number of important commissions, including major mosques, both in Cairo and Alexandria, together with a selection of photographs by RV Lanzone. These latter mine a more conventional vein of nostalgia, and in reality are no more than postcards from the past.

And perhaps that, in the end, is what the entire series of exhibitions added up to. For just as many of the speakers addressed, however obliquely, the city-scapes that might have been — an Adolf Loos department store flagship for the Stein chain of stores, a confabulation of Selfridges Oxford Street and the Step Pyramid at Saqqara, by way of secessionist Vienna, being but the most fantastic example — so too the exhibitions, plotting the tortuous evolution of an urban space that simply refuses to be pickled in aspic.

The biggest international tourism fair in the world ended yesterday. Rehab Saad reports on the importance of the ITB (International Tourism Exchange), the future of the German market in Egypt, and the specific interests of Germans who come for historical and recreational tourism

ITB success story

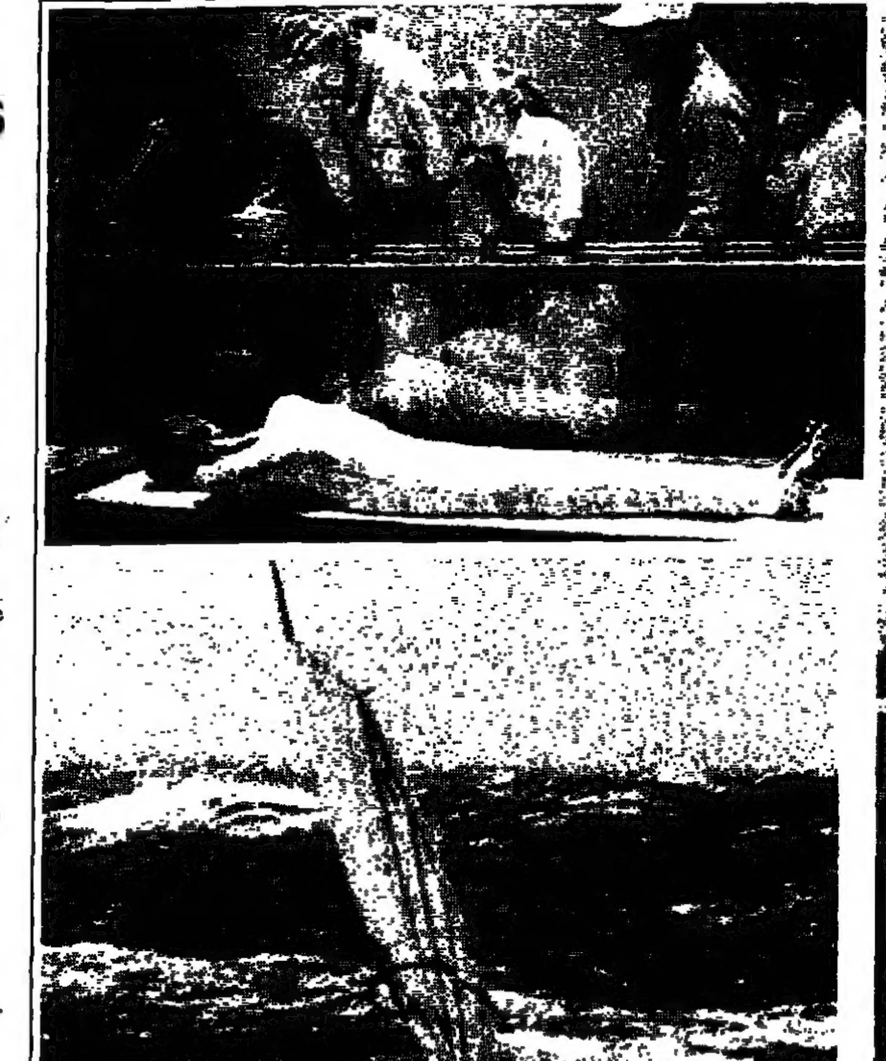
THE INTERNATIONALE Tourismus Boerse (International Tourism Exchange or ITB), held annually in Germany, is one of the most important tourism fairs in the world. It began in 1966, with no more than nine participants, and a mere 300 square metres of floor space. The participants were from five countries only, including Egypt.

Originally, the ITB did not attract businesses or the media attention from outside Germany. Only four years later in 1970, the area of the exhibition expanded to 3,494 square metres. By 1980, it had reached 24,731 square metres, and in 1996, 103,000 square metres. In his opening speech at the ITB in 1996, the mayor of Berlin declared that the space will expand to 130,000 square metres in 1997, with a goal of 160,000 square metres by 1999.

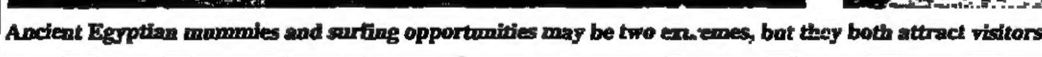
The number of exhibitors has also increased from the original nine to 6,125 representing 148 travel agencies and 176 countries last year.

The success of the ITB is also reflected in the increase of visitors keen to take part in the event. In the 1960s no specialists from outside Germany visited the headquarters of the exhibition whereas in 1996 about 120,000 visitors attended the event including 5,101 journalists from 92 countries.

The ITB is managed by a consultant council (Fahbeirat) which is headed by the director of the official German tourism body (Deutche Zentrale Fuer Tourismus), the organisation responsible for the promotion of tourism to Germany.







Ancient Egyptian mummies and surfing opportunities may be two extremes, but they both attract visitors   photos: Sherif Sonbol

The Germans are coming

Germany has exported more tourists to Egypt than any other nation in the last few years. So, it's little wonder that travel agents, hotel owners, airlines and businessmen travelled to Berlin to take part in the international tourist market this week

Fifty-three Egyptian travel agencies and tourism establishments took part in the annual Internationale Tourismus Boerse (ITB) in Berlin, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Tourism and the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) this week. Egyptian travel agencies, displaying their products outside the nation's large pavilion, vied for space. Large companies were anxious to display their brochures, slides and videos, and meet with clients from all over the world.

The ITB is a place where business tycoons and travel agencies come from the four corners of the world to discuss the latest tourism-related ideas and products. "At the ITB you meet the industry itself," was how Nora Ali, general manager of South Sinai Travel put it.

According to official statistics, the number of Germans who come to Egypt annually has reached 436,809, making the German market the largest and fastest-growing in the nation.

Travel agents discussed its development in the last few years and explained how it became such a big charter operation. "The very first charter flight to land in Sharm El-Sheikh a few years ago was transporting German tourists," said Ali.

Mohamed Ali Salouma of Memnon Tours, a company that reportedly brings about 60,000 Germans to Egypt each year, believes that the importance of the market lies not only in the fact that they come in enormous numbers on charter flights, but that they also become partners in tourism projects here. "They participate in the field of investment and also the running of hotels. Four contracts are to be signed shortly by German businessmen who will run four hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh," said Salouma. The advantages are tremendous, he explained: when they run these establishments, they automatically promote the destination at home, thereby bringing a good number of tourists to South Sinai — tourists who often travel to other parts of Egypt as well.

"Germans are fond of visiting Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh, the well-known destinations for diving, snorkelling and water sports, but not at the expense of the traditional historic destinations. A lot of Germans like to take Nile cruises, and to meet this demand more hotels and Nile cruisers will be built in the coming years," Salouma said.

"Although Germans who prefer to go to the seaside resorts are often divers, enchanted by the exquisite marine life, they see the chance to combine culture with recreation and frequently combine their seaside holiday with a trip to Luxor," said Ali of South Sinai Travel.

Travel agents describe Germans who go on classical tours as well-prepared. "They familiarise themselves with the historical background of the sites, its streets, people and culture before they come. Some of them take time to go to the Egyptian Museum twice and the guides who accompany them are chosen carefully. They are among the most informed and articulate, well aware of their discerning audience," Ali added.

"Polite", "punctual", "smart", "a stable market", are the epithets most travel agents use to describe German tourists. "The German market is one of the most stable, and it is not seasonal — it continues all year round. Tourists from other parts of the world come in spurts and then disappear, but not Germans. In Sharm El-Sheikh, Italians predominated temporarily, but now their number is decreasing. Germans are a stable clientele. Moreover, if there are any regional upsets, they are the last to run," said Amany El-Torgoman of Travco Tours, which brings about 800 Germans to Egypt weekly.

El-Torgoman stressed that Germans are not easy clients. "They pay, but if the standard of service falls short of their expectations, there can be big problems for the travel agency. Germans have to be dealt with on a very professional level."

Despite this rosy picture, Egypt does not receive as many German tourists as it could. "I believe that the airfare is the main deterrent to German travellers. Most go to countries like Majorca because transportation is less expensive. Here in Egypt, hotel prices are good, but the high airfare is a problem," said Ali.

El-Torgoman further explained that quality is important if Egypt is to attract more tourists from Germany. "The improvement and frequency of domestic flights to Upper Egypt is vital. Hurghada's airport is far too small to cope with the number of arriving tourists. On Thursdays, the day most German charter flights land, people have trouble getting into the highly congested airport."

Promoting Egypt in Germany

Why are Germans coming to Egypt in ever increasing numbers. *Al-Ahram Weekly* asked an expert

As a tourism expert, Farid El-Qady considers Germany the most promising market for Egypt. In support of his view, he cites statistics showing that the annual flow of Germans to Egypt is now more than five times what it was 20 years ago.

El-Qady, tourism adviser to the Egyptian Federation of Tourist Chambers, was head of the German branch of the Ministry of Tourism in Frankfurt for many years. Consequently, he has considerable experience with the German market.

"When I was in Germany in 1972, German tourists visiting Egypt numbered only 12,600 yearly. By the time I had left in 1978, that number had increased to 80,000. Now Egypt is attracting 436,809 Germans annually — nearly half a million!" He explained that this was, in no small way, due to promotional budget increases.

"In the 1970s, the budget of the office in Frankfurt was about 75,000DM a year, and that had to cover everything, from advertisements in the German media to participation in international exhibitions and entertainment expenses." El-Qady said he found that the best way to make use of the limited resources was to hold conferences to encourage journalists to write about Egypt in their newspapers.

"Now circumstances are entirely different," he contended. "Between 250,000 and 300,000DM are allocated for the promotion of Egypt in Germany, and the results are fantastic. Both the tourist office and the Ministry of Tourism work in cooperation with specialised German advertising and public relations agencies in promoting Egypt."

Germany, as the largest exporter of tourism in the world, is very important to the Egyptian market. "A German study on 63 million of its country's citizens over 14 years of age, showed that about 48 million, approximately 77 per cent, had travelled abroad in one year. Twenty-two million trips were domestic, inside the European continent, but the rest — about 42.5 million — were overseas. Ten per cent of those came to Egypt. This is considered a large percentage, but Egypt should aim to attract even more," El-Qady explained.

He pointed out that Germans not only travel a lot, but are also "number one in the world in tourist expenditure." German tourists spent $41.9 billion last year in overseas trips, which is why "countries all over the world are keen to take a slice of the German cake. Austria has nine tourism offices in Germany, and Greece has four."

One of the main characteristics of the German market is that it is rarely affected by incidents which might cause concern about regional stability. "This may be related to the nature of Germans in general. They are not easily affected by the media," El-Qady asserted.

Germans are great fans of Egyptian culture and Pharaonic antiquities in particular. "That is the primary reason for their enthusiasm to visit Egypt."

El-Qady believes that participation in international tourist fairs is an important, if expensive, tool for promotion. "It can result in excellent prospects, but due attention must be given to the calibre of the individual sent to represent Egypt."

An interesting fact emerged from El-Qady's remarks: "You can find more Americans attending the ITB in Germany than their own American Society of Travel Agencies (ASTA) congress. Egypt was wise to take up position at this important tourism gathering from its inception in the 1960s."



A traditional Egyptian display abroad

Travel agencies get together

THE CHAMBER of Travel Agencies recently held a symposium to discuss ways of cooperating at international exhibitions abroad. The aim of the symposium, held at the Cairo International Conference Centre, was to coordinate the efforts of Egyptian travel agencies attending international fairs and to encourage smaller agencies to participate in these events.

Baheeg El-Gohary, head of the conferences and exhibitions committee in the Travel Agencies Chamber, said, "Egypt's participation, through both well-established agencies and those still budding needs to be supported, and this can be done by holding more symposia."

Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), described tourist fairs and exhibitions as "one of the most important tools for promoting Egypt. It is the place where clients and exhibitors can meet and a lot of business can be conducted."

Egypt annually participates in 10 tourist fairs abroad. Travel agencies generally participate under the umbrella of the ETA. Of these, Fitur in Spain, ITB in Berlin, Moscow International Exhibition, Multaqa in Bahrain, WTM in London and JADA in Japan are the most important. They include press conferences and "Egyptian nights," where traditional dancing and oriental food are presented to give a taste of Egypt.

"We also participate in 53 specialised exhibitions to promote various tourism activities, not confined to visiting monuments," Abdel-Aziz noted. "We attend exhibitions on yachting, wind surfing, diving equipment and other specialised sectors of the market."

There should be more coordination between travel agencies participating in international exhibitions because financial competition could undermine the business they are trying to promote. Symposium participants agreed to get together before travelling in the future to accomplish this mutually beneficial task.

Naturally, healthy competition is part of the game. "There is a protocol which governs the industry. Speedy replies and good handling of business is what counts," said Nora Ali, general manager of South Sinai Travel.

Travel spots nearby

THE GULF area is no longer confined to oil producing and exporting. It is fast becoming a major tourist destination: surprising but true. In an attempt to lure more tourists to the region, the Gulf countries are holding conferences, organising tourism exhibitions and improving facilities.

The end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1990 also gave a push to Middle East tourism. Efforts have been made to improve the region's image as a top-notch tourist destination.

Family packages

BAHRAIN will launch a $1 million promotional campaign focusing on family packages. It will target the market in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, promoting Bahrain as an ideal destination for family holidays and short breaks, particularly for those who come by road.

Ideas currently being discussed are new hotels, entertainment packages and children's summer camps. Other plans aim at upgrading shopping and sightseeing tours, along with devising new sporting events.

In addition to Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries, Bahrain's key markets for tourism and investment are India, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Back in Beirut

SINCE the end of its 15-year civil war, Beirut has been trying to restore its reputation as a first-class tourist destination.

In an attempt to attract business travellers and develop leisure tourism, hotel construction, renovation of bombed areas and improvement of the infrastructure are increasing. Moreover, several international hotel chains have returned to the city, once known as the "Paris of the Middle East," and a number of areas have been reopened in central Beirut.

In 1974, a year before the civil war broke out, three million tourists and business travellers visited Lebanon, contributing 20 per cent of its GNP.

Petra boost

THE JORDANIAN government has decided to spend over $100 million in the next two years to improve the infrastructure around Petra, Jordan's famous rose-coloured ancient city in the desert.

This decision was taken after complaints by local hotel owners that the government had failed to provide the town with a proper sewage system, high voltage electricity, telephone lines and paved roads.

Tourism cooperation

JORDAN, Israel and Palestine have begun a joint tourism promotion campaign aimed at the US market. This move is the latest in a series of joint marketing initiatives in the region. Last September, Jordan and Israel signed a tourism deal setting up a committee to discuss cross-border travel, visa arrangements and the development of tourism in the Dead Sea and Aqaba-Eilat regions.

First flight

PALESTINIAN airlines operated its first flight last month from Port Said at the northern end of the Suez Canal to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The plane took off from Port Said because Israel refused to grant permission for a flight from the airport in Gaza.

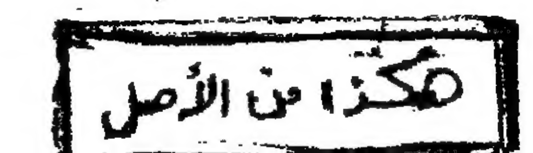
Tourist department

DUBAI has established a new department for tourism and commercial marketing. One of its major jobs will be setting up plans and programmes to attract tourists from all over the world to the emirate. It will be also responsible for tour guides and for licensing hotels, furnished apartments and travel agencies.

Airport exhibition

DUBAI will be hosting an airport technology and equipment exhibition from 9 to 11 March 1998. The exhibition will display airport construction and design models, aircraft equipment, air traffic control and airport service operations.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Young blood scores high

The winners at this year's Tae Kwon Do World Cup were the "young-bloods". **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

Egypt played host to the World Tae Kwon Do Cup while the rest of the countries collected the medals

photos: Amr Gamal

Amidst cheers from around 3,000 spectators, the top 16 tae kwon do teams in the world competed in the Eighth World Tae Kwon Do Cup last week at Ahli Club. Although strong contenders like South Korea, the game's creators and the defending champions, and Chinese Taipei maintained a strong hold on the gold medals, it was the sport's "new blood" which stole the show.

South Korea's team won the men's title along with five gold medals and one bronze, while the women won the title with two gold, one silver, and two bronze. The traditionally strong Chinese Taipei won second place in the women's event with two gold and one bronze.

This year saw the rise of the newcomers like the US, Iran, and Morocco. Ever since tae kwon do officially became an Olympic sport, competition has intensified among European and American teams most of whom were only organised in recent years.

Both novices to the competition circuit, the US and Iran were arch rivals during this year's World Cup. Iran managed to clinch second place in the men's event with one gold, one silver and one bronze, while the US followed in third place with one gold, one silver and one bronze.

The Egyptian national men's team had been expected to win third place as they did in the World Cup last year in Brazil and the year before in the Cayman Islands. However, this year the team brought home fifth place after Korea, Iran, the US and Mexico.

Korea's technical coach Chung Young offered a consoling explanation: "It's not that the team's performance has deteriorated, but rather that the other countries have improved quickly. Everyone is competing extra hard with an eye on Olympic gold in Sydney."

Fatma Gaber and Nevine Abdel-Hamid, both members of the national women's team, agreed with Chung. They said that newcomers to the sport, like the US and Morocco, have progressed significantly since last year. "Such countries were considered underdogs in last year's World Cup," Abdel-Hamid said.

The national women's team won sixth place after South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Spain, Russia and Mexico. The performance of 17-year-old Marwa El-Hami — the only Egyptian who won a gold medal in the tournament — attracted the attention of experts from South Korea and Chinese Taipei. Bob Tsan-Tsung, president of the South Korean delegation, said: "I was very surprised at this young girl's performance. She has a strong mind, she plays with a very flexible technique and she is definitely talented."

The young star is evidence that what the national team needs is new blood: this year's players — with few exceptions — have been on board since 1992. Some, like Mahmoud Shalabi and Tamer Abdel-Moneim, have suffered serious injuries in other competitions.

South Korea — with which the Egyptian team plays friendly matches at least twice annually — changes their national team entirely every year. Thereby, a wide base of tae kwon do players is created and the competition among them enhances overall team performance.

Hammer throw

ROMANIAN Mihaela Melinte broke the world women's hammer throwing record at the national championships last weekend. Her 69.57-metre throw, 16 centimetres further than her own previous world record, beat the previous record of 68.16 metres held by Olga Kuzenkova of Russia.

Into Africa

Two wins and a draw — Egyptian football clubs got off to a good start in the three African club competitions, reports **Eric Asmougha**

The three African club competitions kicked off last weekend with encouraging results for Egyptian fans: wins for Zamalek and Mansoura, and a goalless draw for Arab Col _ ctors.

In the first leg of the first round of the Champions League Cup, two second-half goals by Zamalek against the visiting St George of Ethiopia put smiles of relief on the faces of around 15,000 home fans. Midfielder Mohamed Sabri struck in Zamalek's first goal in the 30th minute of second half from an immaculate free kick just outside the penalty area, skimming the ball over a defensive wall. This was a well deserved crowning moment for Sabri, one of Rudi Krol's African Games gold-medal winning team who is yet to be drafted onto the present national squad.

His winning shot was followed about 10 minutes later by Zamalek's second goal. A right cross from Khalid Gandour was picked up by Ayman Mansour. His kick hit the goal post, but the chance was not lost. Experienced team captain Ahmed Kass caught the rebound and tapped it past the Ethiopian goalkeeper into the net.

It was a disappointing match for St George, who played a remarkable, well thought-out game in their own distinctive style. They would have dearly loved to hold Zamalek to a goalless draw, and are now promising revenge in the second leg, to be played in Addis Ababa next week.

In the first leg, first round of the Winners Cup, Mansoura pulled out all the stops and neatly secured a first away win, defeating Merreikh of Sudan 1-0. This is Mansoura's first time in a continental competition and the Egyptians were taking nothing for granted. Their sharp performance won the admiration of a reported 60,000 spectators who had filled the Merreikh stadium to support their home team.

Hero of the match was Walid Salaheddin, who pinned down Ayman Moheb's cross to score in the 20th minute. The Sudanese lost a precious opportunity to equalise in the 37th minute of the second half when they failed to score from a penalty kick. This was followed by another near miss at the other end of the field, when a kick from Mansoura's Hossam Abdel-Ghani bounced off the goal post. So, as the final whistle blew, the score stood at 1-0 in Mansoura's favour. A win or a draw in the second leg next week will earn the Egyptian team a spot in the second round — Coach Hassan Megahed is looking forward to that.

As the new boys were cruising to victory, Winners Cup defending champions, Arab Contractors of Egypt, were having a rough time playing away against Mumias Sugar of Kenya. Contractors failed to score and the game ended in a goalless draw.

In another first round Champions League Cup match, South Africa's Orlando Pirates managed a 1-0 win over Romaa Rovers of Lesotho at home, through a 32nd minute goal by Brandon Silent.

Other results in the Winners Cup: US Goreene of Senegal 1, MC Oran of Algeria 0; FC 105 of Gabon 2, Progresso of Angola 0; Scouts of Mauritius 2, Sainte Louisienne of Reunion 1.

In the CAF Cup: defending champions Kawkab of Morocco 1, ASC of Senegal 0; Stade Abidjan of Côte d'Ivoire 2, USFA of Burkina Faso 3; Kampala City Council of Uganda 3, Rwanda FC of Rwanda 0.

The Egyptian Football Association (EFA) has accepted the resignation of the national team's administrative manager, and fired the technical manager. Former coach Mahmoud El-Gohari has been called back on board to set things straight. **Abeer Anwar** reports



Gohari returns

After a series of defeats and modest performances against Tunisia, Senegal, Kuwait and Ethiopia, the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) was compelled to take a stand against the technical body of the national team headed by administrative manager Mahmoud El-Kharib, who not only resigned, but also returned six months worth of his salary to the EFA. Technical manager Farouk Gafaar, was subsequently fired.

In view of these recent setbacks, the situation has become very critical, especially as the national team prepares to play a decisive match against Liberia in the 1998 World Cup qualifications in April. This is their last chance to seek a place in the finals in France.

After a series of debates, EFA's board of directors finally decided that Mahmoud El-Gohari was best suited to take charge. He had guided the national team to some of its most memorable victories. With El-Gohari as coach, the national football team went to the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy, after a 56-year-long absence from the event. He has also coached the country's two top football clubs: Ahli and Zamalek. Zamalek won two major championships during his tenure as their coach: the African Championship Cup and the African Super Cup.

Samir Zaher, head of the EFA, and treasurer Hani Abou Reida travelled to Oman last week to meet El-Gohari who is training Oman's national team. He immediately agreed to take charge.

"I know that it is a very serious and risky responsibility to take on, but I can't refuse because it is a patriotic duty," he said at a press conference held to announce the decision. El-Gohari brought on board Dr Ahmed Maged as team doctor. He also cancelled several friendly matches already planned for the team including Zambia and Cameroon.

"Zambia's technique differs completely than that of Liberia's so the match will be of no use," said El-Gohari, who takes over 27 March.

Meanwhile, league matches will continue until 26 March. El-Gohari said, "I'm not going to start before that time because three clubs — Zamalek, Mansoura and Arab Contractors — are busy with African engagements, so the players are already physically and mentally over-loaded. The other players who are free will be taking part in the league matches."

Names of the players who will participate in the match against Liberia will be announced 26 March by Fathi Mabrouk, the national team's trainer, since El-Gohari will still be in Oman coaching the Omani national team through the Asian Qualification. The Egypt-Liberia match will take place on 6 April.

"All I need in the coming period is to encourage the players to do their best and to choose the right players who will be able to stand the challenge," said El-Gohari.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**





Anouar Abdel Malik:

Question marks, all the way around the Cape. The well-digger remembers: specific cities, and the generality of the world

The Silk Road

Lest anyone assume that Anouar Abdel Malik's life has been smooth sailing, a caveat: this is very far from the truth. The silk road is no reference to the ease with which he has traveled life's paths, but to the trade routes that used to link what Abdel Malik calls "the great civilisational empires of the Orient" — Egypt, Persia and China — before the Orient was circumvented by the maritime discoveries of the 16th century.

Anyone who knows anything about Abdel Malik's work will immediately recognize the centrality of two terms: the Orient, and civilisations. These recur throughout the impressive oeuvre he has produced during the past 35 years — that is, since he made his much-noticed entry into international academia with the publication of his seminal book *Egypte, Société Militaire* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1962). In 1963 he published an article in *Diogenes* , "Orientalism in Crisis", where he first introduced the notion, now well-known — thanks to Edward Said's *Orientalism*— of an "Orientalised Orient". Those who know Said's work are aware of the intellectual debt he owes Abdel Malik, whose seminal article he quotes several times.

What few may know, however, is the role Abdel Malik played in modifying the notion of a clash of civilisations recently popularised by Samuel Huntington. A few months before the 1993 publication of "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs*, both Huntington and Abdel Malik participated in a symposium in Luxembourg. Huntington outlined the ideas upon which he was later to expound in his article. When Abdel Malik's turn to speak came, he decided, with characteristic impetuosity, not to deliver the paper he had prepared, and instead set himself the task of replying to Huntington's central theme: the inevitability of the clash.

Unlike the vast majority of Huntington's critics, Abdel Malik does not ascribe a secondary role to civilisational, cultural and spiritual elements in the transformation of the world. On the contrary, he believes that, if the future holds any promise of a better world than the present one, torn into hostile war-like camps, this can only be achieved by introducing spiritual and civilisational dimensions. Although he does not believe in the inevitability of a clash of civilizations, he ascribes paramount importance to civilisational specificities. If today's bleak reality — "the West versus the rest" — is to be superceded by a future of coexistence and cooperation, this can never happen without the resurgence of the Orient.

Abdel Malik will certainly disagree with the statement Huntington makes at the end of his famous article: "The West will have to maintain the economic and military power to protect its interests in relation to other civilizations." He would wholeheartedly support the very last words of the article, however: "for the relevant future, there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to coexist with the others." It might even be the case that the closing lines of Huntington's article, as well as the question mark in its title, owe their very existence to Abdel Malik's intervention in Luxembourg.

In many ways, this episode symbolises much of Anouar Abdel Malik's influence: often implicit, usually decisive.

Born in 1925 to educated, middle-class parents, he lost his father, a lawyer who had been active in the nationalist anti-British revolution of 1919, when he was very young. His mother dedicated her long life (she died only few years ago) to bringing up her only son, and later to ensuring his well-being, gradually widening her circle of compassion to include many of his friends and comrades, who were active in the Egyptian progressive and anti-imperialist movement of the 1940s. "A noble woman from the land of Egypt, without whose existence I could never have continued or achieved what I have achieved," as Abdel Malik himself wrote in an autobiographical article.

His first ten years of education were spent at the Collège de la Sainte Famille, under the strict supervision of Jesuit fathers, who had a formative influence on his way of thinking. Until today, Abdel Malik speaks warmly of the Jesuits. He, and the peoples of the Third World, owe them liberation theology, and another pivotal concept in his thinking: inculturation.

After graduation in 1940, he began working at the Crédit Foncier Egyptien in Cairo. It is apparently during the six years he spent working at the bank that, ironically perhaps, he became active in the underground progressive movement of the period. Along with politics came his first serious readings in philosophy: naturally, Hegel and Marx. His interest in philosophy gradually emerged in the articles and translations he penned during that period.

By 1950, Abdel Malik had been in the real world, far from formal education, for ten years; but many of those who read his work began urging him to study philosophy systematically at university. Special permission was required from the minister of education. Fortunately, this was not difficult to obtain; the minister of education at the time was Taha Hussein himself. Thus did Abdel Malik enrol at university in September 1950, thanks to Taha Hussein, who decreed that bureaucratic considerations should not pose an obstacle to a scholar with the potential of this prodigal student. He graduated from the philosophy department of Ain Shams University in 1954 with top honours.

The same year, he was accused of being a communist, arrested, and thrown in jail, where he spent two years. Upon his release he found a job as a philosophy teacher at the Cairo Lycée. He left the job a year later. What he did between 1957 and 1960, when he appeared in Paris, having escaped the mass arrests of the first six months of 1959, is a mystery. Legends continue to proliferate: how he escaped, how he managed to reach France... Abdel-Malik himself is keeping mum on that, and though he only returned to Egypt a few years after Nasser's death, today the president's portrait hangs in his study by that of Sun Tzu, the Chinese philosopher who wrote *The Art of War* in the fifth century BC.

Between 1960 and 1990, Anouar Abdel Malik worked for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris, obtaining his Doctorat 3ème Cycle in 1964, and his Doctorat d'Etat ès-lettres in 1969, both from the Sorbonne with top honours. Since the publication of his first book written in French, *Peuples d'Afrique*, in 1961, Abdel Malik has written and edited more than 30 books in the three languages he masters — Arabic, French and English. Although a profile may not be the best place for a bibliography, one book must be mentioned, the two-volume work entitled: *Social Dialectics (1): Civilisations and Nations*, and *Social Dialectics (2): Nations and Revolutions*, published by Macmillan (London, 1981). Since the beginning of the 1970s, Abdel Malik has been working tirelessly to develop a theory of specificity. In 1972 he published *La Dialectique Sociale* ; in 1977, *Spécificité et Théorie Sociale* appeared. These are hardly books with mass appeal. But patient perusal reveals Abdel Malik's prime concern: finding a methodology that would enable one to relate the particular to the universal. Unfortunately, these works remain known only to a relatively limited circle of researchers and intellectuals, and if Abdel Malik has any regrets, they are that his work on social dialectics has not been sufficiently acknowledged.

This concern is hardly the disappointment of the elitist academic. Social dialectics represented the culmination of an extensive individual and collective theoretical project that took him to almost every corner of the globe, and prompted him to design, supervise and participate in numerous research projects and meetings in almost every Arab, Asian, African and Latin American scientific institution. Social dialectics, then, represent his contribution to the cause for which he feels most passionately: the liberation of the peoples of the Third World (although it is probably safe to say that he would reject the numerical classification indignantly). More likely, he would prefer to refer to the emancipation of the peoples of the East — East of what? Abdel Malik might ask. Perhaps, then, simply the emancipation of all the oppressed.

Although Anouar Abdel Malik lived mainly in France until he retired from the CNRS in 1990, he spent long sabbaticals in Japan, China, Kuala Lumpur, Mexico, and numerous Western cities: Berlin, Cambridge, Los Angeles and Moscow. His longest stay was in Japan, where he coordinated a giant research project on socio-cultural alternatives for the Tokyo-based United Nations University between 1976 and 1986.

In the beginning of the 1990s, Abdel Malik bought a flat in Heliopolis with a view of the Merryland Gardens, where he spends at least half the year. While in Cairo, he hosts a weekly cultural gathering, affording many of those who have only heard about the man and his ideas the opportunity to see him.

He always makes an entrance; you are immediately aware of his presence, his refusal to fit into a formula. He is courtly, tall; his bearing, somehow, reminds one of spacious marble halls. His elegant silver hair is still a reminder of the glossy life. But the holy dust of academia does not stick to his clothes. He is very easy to talk to, although perhaps subversively bookish, full of mischievous references to opaque concepts which delight him. These contradictions are him: easy to fall in love with, but the price might be high. He always quotes Aragon's words: "There is no happy love." But as he utters these, with melancholy, his lids drop over eyes which remain humorous — nothing heavy.

An English friend who does not know him well, but who has seen him quite often, describes him thus: He is classless, but he suggests the top.

East and west (wrong terms again?) blend easily. He would look equally comfortable strolling on the lawns of Glyndebourne during a *Marriage of Figaro*, or walking around the Kyoto Zen Gardens in Japan, two places of which he is very fond and which he knows well. There are other places. Every year he spends a fortnight at Baden-Baden, a 20-year-old habit. In summer he spends part of his holiday in Elba, Napoleon's base before his short-lived escapade: an aroma of adventure and defeat.

One of the things he abhors most, in academia or the rest of life, is the neglect of the founding fathers, the omission of inspiration's source. Another of Abdel Malik's favourite quotes: Chou En Lai's aquatic exhortation: "Remember the well-diggers when you drink the water."

Profile by **Mona Anis**

Les Routes de la Soie

Principales routes terrestres et route maritime
Routes terrestres secondaires
Trajet et dates des expéditions
Ville de départ ou d'arrivée des expéditions

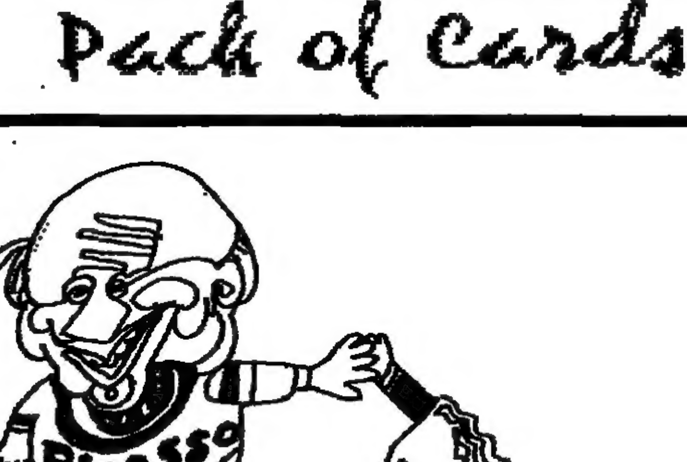
OCÉAN PACIFIQUE

OCÉAN INDIEN

Simplified version of a map prepared by Prof. A.H. Dani (Pakistan) within the framework of a research project on the Silk Road

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris





♥ And when the great (ta ta ta ta) go marching in (ta ta etc...)Wasn't it a divine, artistically uplifting week! It took yours truly, at a gallop, from the Duroub Gallery (opposite the US Embassy) where Salah Enani in the role of the artist — full beard, flowing cravat and intense expression firmly in place — was exhibiting his latest blockbuster — in size and price — featuring his vision of the Cairo Film Festival, to the Opera House (you know where that is), where I was regaled by the voice of George Bahgory, aka Placido Domingo II, soaring in celebration of the artistic joys of gay Paris to finally land me, breathless, at the Riash Gallery (in Gezira El-Wusta Street) where I was refreshed by the works of Egyptian artists who had fixed some of Egypt's *eternal features on canvass. O, colour me beautiful*, I couldn't help humming on my way home.

